Dissent

GÖRAN THERBORN and SHERI BERMAN on SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

II 2000 $9.50 Canada

Thomas Pogge
JUSTICE

Michael Walzer
REGIMES

GLOBAL POLITICS

Robert V. Daniels
SUPERPOWER AMERICA

Mark Levinson
THE WORLD BANK

ELLEN WILLIS ON NORMAN PODHORETZ

Harold Meyerson
CAMPAIGN COMMENTARY

James B. Rule
POLITICS AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

Nicholas Howe
MIDWEST BY MIDWEST

For Reference
Not to be taken from this room

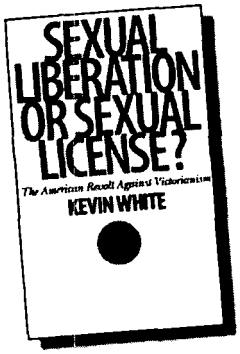
03
0 73361 64790 0

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM B. PICKETT

Eisenhower Decides to Run

The reluctant object of a presidential draft movement? Thanks to William Pickett's assiduous research, we now have the full story of Eisenhower's pursuit of the White House. "With vivid prose, analytical savvy, and a cache of recently found documents, Pickett definitively deflates the myth....It's impossible not to admire the new historical detail presented in this landmark study."
—DOUGLAS BRINKLEY.



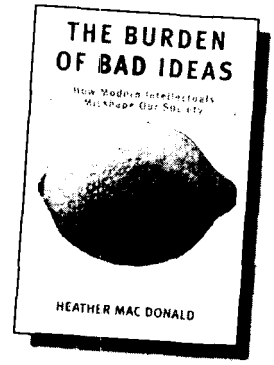
KEVIN WHITE

Sexual Liberation or Sexual License?

The century-long struggle over sexual boundaries is the subject of Kevin White's rich account of the American revolt against Victorianism. "A bold and engaging survey of American sexual mores....This is a brave and highly readable study that deserves the widest possible audience."
—WILLIAM L. O'NEILL. New in the American Ways Series.

HEATHER MAC DONALD

The Burden of Bad Ideas



One of the very best—and least recognized—of our urban journalists considers the upside-down world of public policy in closely reported stories from the streets of New York to the seats of intellectual power. "If there were any justice in the world, Mac Donald would be knee-deep in Pulitzer Prizes and National Magazine Awards for her pioneering work."—DAVID BROOKS.

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher

Chicago • A Member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group
At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-462-6420
with a major credit card.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dissent

EDITORS
MITCHELL COHEN
IRVING HOWE 1920-1993
MICHAEL WALZER

MANAGING EDITOR
MAXINE PHILLIPS

BOOK REVIEW EDITORS
MARK LEVINSON
BRIAN MORTON

BUSINESS MANAGER
DEBRA PLASTRIK

ASSISTANT EDITORS
KIRA BRUNNER
RACHEL NEUMANN

RESEARCHER
SARAH POTTER

INTERNS
GREGG KAYSON
MICHAEL SCHMELTZER

EDITORIAL BOARD
BERNARD AVISHAI
JOANNE BARKAN
DAVID BENSMAN
MARSHALL BERMAN
PAUL BERMAN
H. BRAND
DAVID BROMWICH
LUTHER P. CARPENTER
JEAN L. COHEN
LEWIS COSER
BOGDAN DENITCH
JEFF FAUX
CYNTHIA FUCHS EPSTEIN
TODD GITLIN
DAVID GLENN
MURRAY HAUSKNECHT
ROBERT HEILBRONER
AGNÈS HELLER
MICHAEL KAZIN
RANDALL KENNEDY
MARTIN KILSON
ERAZIM KOHÁK
WILLIAM KORNBLUM
JEREMY LARNER
DEBORAH MEIER
HAROLD MEYERSON
NICOLAUS MILLS
JO-ANN MORT
CAROL O'CLEIREACAIN
GEORGE PACKER
MARTIN PERETZ
ANSON RABINBACH
RUTH ROSEN
JAMES B. RULE
ALAN RYAN
PATRICIA CAYO SEXTON
JIM SLEEPER
ANN SNITOW
CORNEL WEST
SEAN WILENTZ
DENNIS WRONG

Editor's Page

OCT 2000
PERIODICAL DEPARTMENT
Toronto Reference Library

WHATEVER questions dominate this year's presidential campaign, however they are reported in the media, the context in which they will eventually be answered has been "globalized." We are all internationalists now. Politics is still local, of course; as Göran Therborn argues in this issue, it is still possible to have social democracy in one country—and then, one by one, in many countries. This is a critically important argument, seconded here by Sheri Berman, who emphasizes the primacy of political decision over economic choice in social democratic thought. And the state remains the key instrument of political decision. Still, we live in an expanding universe: what happens elsewhere is of more and more importance for what happens here. Borders are more readily crossed—by money and commodities, movies and music, migrants and refugees, soldiers and their weapons—than ever before in the history of the nation-state. ■ And the market is the driving force of the expansion. Unions, political movements, the associations of international civil society, lag far behind. The primacy of politics in the globalization process has not yet been established. The place where it most needs to be established, according to Thomas Pogge, is the place of greatest human suffering and market failure—the poorest countries in the world, where hundreds of thousands die each year of preventable starvation and disease, which no one with wealth or power is sufficiently interested in to prevent. He puts the claims of these people into the language of justice, the most powerful language of modern political discourse. The same claims could also be expressed in the language of solidarity or compassion. In any case, they require answers to hard questions about commitment, agency, and personal and institutional responsibility beyond the bounds of the nation-state. Who should respond, and how, to distant suffering? My own essay is an effort to describe the political arrangements within which responses might take place and to appraise their strengths and weaknesses. Robert Daniels provides a skeptical view of the ability of the United States to play a leading role in shaping this new global politics. ■ *Dissent* has carried many articles about the military forms of humanitarian intervention—forceful responses to massacre and ethnic cleansing—but not much about the political and economic forms recommended by Pogge, which respond to poverty, famine, and illness. His article breaks new ground, which we intend to cultivate further. ■ The case is the same with Jim Rule's article on the new electronic technologies. The left was once focused with great intensity and at least intermittant hopefulness on technological advance (which some Marxists, indeed, took to be the driving force of history). Then leftist intellectuals became more skeptical, or fearful, or maybe just uncertain; the topic virtually disappeared from our pages. But so many people are so strongly engaged with their new machines that it is time to bring technology back into the realm of speculation, analysis, and debate. Rule reopens the discussion.

M.W.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dissent

Fall 2000

Editor's Page
Michael Walzer
1

Campaign Commentary
Harold Meyerson analyzes the candidates, 5

Brave New Globe
Mark Levinson on the cracking Washington Consensus, 11

Politics Abroad
Shalom Lappin on Blair's conservatism, 15 ■ Frédéric Martel on gay rights in France, 20 ■ Winifred Tate on Washington's war in Colombia, 24 Douglas W. Payne on Mexico's neoliberal transition, 28 ■ Kira Brunner on resistance to Milosevic, 32

Articles
The Moral Demands of Global Justice
Thomas W. Pogge
37

Governing the Globe
Michael Walzer
44

Home Alone
Can America Play the Superpower Role?
Robert V. Daniels
53

Social Democracy in One Country?
Göran Therborn
59

Rediscovering Social Democracy
Sheri Berman
66

50 Ways to Say You're Fired
Working in Italy and the U.S.A.
Joanne Barkan
73

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Common Enemy: Students Fight Private Prisons
Liza Featherstone
78

The Information Society, the New Economy, and the Hype
James B. Rule
83

Arguments
Menachem Rosner differs with Jo-Ann Mort and Gary Brenner on the future of the kibbutz, 89

Notebook
Nicholas Howe explores representations of the American Heartland, 95

Magazines
Ashley Nelson on *Lucky*, 102
Marshall Berman on *Crossing Swords*, 105

Books
Ellen Willis on Norman Podhoretz's *My Love Affair With America*, 108
John Hoerr on Jack Metzgar's *Striking Steel*, 112 ■ Keith Gessen on Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, 115 ■ Alex Halberstadt on Jim DeRogatis's *Let It Blurt*, 120 ■ John Palattella on Edward Mendelson's *Later Auden*, 123

Letters
127

The Last Page
Maxine Phillips
128

Dissent (ISSN 0012-3846), issued October 1, 2000, is published quarterly—winter, spring, summer, and fall—by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc., 310 Riverside Drive, #1201, New York, N.Y. 10025. Phone: 212-316-3120. Web site: http://www.dissentmagazine.org. E-mail: for new subscriptions: orders_dissent@fulcoinc.com; for subscription inquiries: custsvc_dissent@fulcoinc. com; for editorial and all other inquiries: editors@dissentmagazine.org. Address for subscriptions: *Dissent*, Subscription Services Department, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834-3000. Subscriptions: $22.00 for one year; $40.00 for two years; $15.00 for students for one year; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $7.00 for mailing costs per year; institutional rate $34.00 per year, $58.00 for two years; single copy $7.50. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency. For special rates on bulk orders from organizations, teachers, etc., write directly to *Dissent* . For information on newsstand and bookstore distribution write to: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, Ohio 44846-9705; phone: 1-800-221-3148. **Postmaster**: Send address changes to *Dissent*, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, N.J. 07834-3000. © 2000 by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc. (FSISI). Permission to reprint any article must be obtained from the publishers. **Manuscripts** will not be considered unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Volume 47, Number 4 (whole No. 200). Made in U.S.A. ISSN 0012-3846. *Dissent* does not engage in lobbying or support candidates or legislation. Opinions expressed in signed articles and editorials are entirely those of the authors. Cover designs by Daniel McClain. *Dissent* is indexed in *Academic Abstracts*, the Alternative Press Index, the Infotrak Academic Index, Left Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin*, University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, the *Social Science Source*, and *Sociological Abstracts*. *Dissent* is a member of the Independent Press Association.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Word to Our Readers

Dissent **will soon be entering its forty-seventh year. If we do say so ourselves, it's a remarkable record for an independent magazine of the democratic left.**

But in order to keep going, we need your help. *Dissent* is run with rigorous frugality. All of us who work on the magazine and write for it contribute our labor, time, talents, and money. And yet we cannot earn more than (roughly) three-fifths of what it costs to print and distribute *Dissent*. The rest must come—and for almost forty-six years *has* come—from our loyal readers.

We ask for help only every two years, and we ask only for what we absolutely need to keep going . . . well, a little more, to "grow" the magazine. Our goal for 2001 is

$120,000

Please lend a hand—if possible, with contributions of three figures (or even four: we believe in progressive self-taxation). You can pay out your pledge in installments over the next two years or you can make life a little easier for us by sending the full amount now.

If you contribute one hundred dollars or more to this fund drive, you'll receive our newsletter and invitations to events with our editorial board.

Essential information: *Dissent* is published by the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, Inc. All contributions should be made out to the foundation (you can abbreviate: FSISI) *and are tax-deductible*.

☐ My check is enclosed (drawn on U.S. currency).
☐ Bill my gift of $_____ to: ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard
Card no. _____
Signature _____ Exp. date _____
☐ I would prefer to pay in two installments:
I enclose $_____ and will pay the balance of $____ in _____ (month) of 2001.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

FSISI/*Dissent*, 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nap Time in America

Harold Meyerson

IT'S NAP TIME in America. As I write, in the summer of our content, the nation seems blissfully oblivious of the presidential campaign, and the candidates themselves are doing little to rouse it from its rest.

In the case of the W., a quiet candidacy makes perfect sense. The W.'s calling card is his affability, which he can reaffirm daily with a brief, genial appearance. He's long since sewn up his GOP base—polls show him drawing more than 90 percent Republican support—which frees him to focus solely on moderates and independents, taking care not to startle them with right-wing rhetoric or sudden loud noises.

In the case of Al Gore, however, such silence equals political death. Gore's not been shy about attacking Bush or trying out some populist themes, but he cannot yet (I'm writing just before the Republican Convention) be said to have a message or to have excited any constituency (for that matter, any individual) I know of. Democrats don't win unless their base is ablaze with passion, unless unionists and students and enviros have taken to the streets on their behalf. And Gore clearly has not sewn up his base—polls show him drawing between 70 percent and 80 percent of Democrats. He not only has to reach swing voters but reconnect with voters mulling over the Nader option—that is, carry both the Teamsters and the turtles of American politics.

Gore himself is something of an anomaly: a politician who's genuinely uncomfortable around people. As Nicholas Lemann has noted, he veers between two very distinct modes of behavior: painstaking precision and propriety (the slow-speaking Gore) and hail-fellow folksiness (the g-droppin' Gore). These, apparently, exhaust his behavioral repertoire; the public Gore knows no other way to conduct himself.

Unfortunately, Gore's politics are just as unintegrated as his public personalities. In the course of his campaign, he's made quite a number of discrete progressive proposals, each of which contrasts sharply with the W.'s proposed policies. At the same time, his broad economic vision is sharply at odds with both past and present elements of Democratic economics. Where a more adept politician like Bill Clinton can claim to have synthesized Old and New Democratic beliefs in the third way, Gore simply zips between one and the other. (He is a clearer thinker than Clinton, but a far less supple one.)

Gore is the legitimate heir to a party that has grown far too comfortable with capitalism and its values at the very moment that those values threaten to eclipse all others, reducing citizens to consumers, discourse to advertising. Gore's Democratic Party (as distinct, say, from David Bonior's) is more deeply indebted to corporate and financial interests than any party in human history, with the possible exception of Bush's Republicans. The Democrats are less neoliberal than they are neo-indentured; they are the second coming of the Democratic Party of the Gilded Age—the party rejected by many working men of that time in favor of the socialists or populists. And there is in this election a clear social-democratic alternative to Gore. The Ralph Nader who is running for president this year is not the Ralph Nader of 1996 or before. His critique has become more systemic; his manner more prophetic. He campaigns not simply against global capital but against what capitalism has done to us, against the commodification of everything. In all these particulars, his campaign is a continuation of the Battle of Seattle by other means.

Despite his party's and his own surrender

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the spell of the market, Gore has been compelled by his inability to nail down his own base to sound more populist notes. He is proposing a prescription drug benefit here, a patients' bill of rights there, making carefully targeted attacks on carefully targeted industries. Even before he started droppin' more "g"s, Gore was promoting a number of policies that stood in sharp contrast to those of the W. He is the candidate of cultural liberalism or, more precisely, the cultural liberalism of the upper-middle class. He is the candidate who favors preserving universal (that is, middle-class) entitlements. Above all, for all those on the left seeking a reason to go for Gore, there is the prospect of a Bush presidency. The very thought, say, of Bush appointees to the Supreme Court or the Bush administration's policy toward unions should chill any progressive heart.

I have never been a fan of third-party ventures, nor am I much of a Nader fan even now. Yet I find the choice between Gore and Nader a much closer call than I could have imagined even a year ago. The rightward stampede of the Democratic Party is accelerating; a respectable showing by Nader could just possibly partially brake it. The problem is what gets broken in the process.

IT'S WHEN he ponders the really big questions that Gore is at his worst.

Consider, for instance, the strange case of the vanishing debt. The Clinton administration's war on the deficit began with the 1993 budget, which quite commendably raised taxes on the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans. Clinton then agreed to Republican demands to eliminate the deficit, so long as he could protect Medicare and several other popular programs from further GOP cutbacks—by so doing, putting the Gingrichites on the defensive.

Two years ago, as the deficit turned to a surplus, Clinton came forth with a strategy to fend off proposed Republican tax cuts: a proposal, Heisenbergian in its incomprehensibility, to protect Social Security by paying down the debt. The Social Security part of the proposal went nowhere, but today, retiring the debt by 2012—as opposed, say, to establishing universal health insurance—has emerged as the cornerstone of Clinton-Gore fiscal policy. Thus have tactical ploys devised to derail Republican folly become the holy grail of modern Democratic economics.

For his part, Gore has gone one step further: telling the *Wall Street Journal* that he'd not be inclined to run a deficit even during a depression (a proposal that shocked John McCain, whose understanding of Keynesianism seems further along than Gore's). Gore, in short, is something new in the political firmament: an Andrew Mellon Democrat. (Mellon was Herbert Hoover's treasury secretary, who counseled Hoover to slash spending as the depression deepened, and advised business to "Liquidate capital, liquidate assets, liquidate men.") Even putting aside his belief that the proper role of government is to grow a recession, Gore's emphasis on debt retirement over, say, comprehensive health care or more classrooms, is bizarre. As several liberal commentators have noted, it's rather like a family electing to defer purchasing health insurance or saving for the kids' college fund, in order to pay off the mortgage more quickly.

(Consider, by the way, the evolution of the policy debate here. From the early eighties through the mid-nineties, the Republicans, and the conservative movement generally, were divided into two camps on economic issues: the deficit hawks and the supply-side tax cutters. Today, what was once an internal Republican debate has become a debate between deficit-hawk [now, debt-hawk] Democrats and tax-cutting Republicans. The green eyeshade has been passed—entrusting a raft of social problems, in the absence of government intervention, to the mercies of the market.)

This perspective of debt avoidance *über alles* has now been enshrined in Al Gore's Democratic platform. "Today's Democrats," the document reads, "believe we should pay down the debt every year until we can give our children the independence, self-sufficiency and prosperity that will come from an America that is debt free." Calvin Coolidge could not have said it better.

The Gore platform also pledges that the party will continue its support for free trade—even though the clear majority of the party surely does not support the continuation of free trade. If the Democrats newfound abhorrence of all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

debt makes it difficult for the party to deliver on programs that its core constituencies support, its ongoing infatuation with free trade is a direct affront to those constituencies—*and* to white working-class voters who are the swing voters Gore will need this November. Indeed, in the seven key states in the Jersey City-to-Kansas City belt, where Gore will either win or lose the election—New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin—fifty-two out of fifty-six House Democrats opposed the administration's bill to grant permanent normalized trade status to China this spring. (That's a ratio of thirteen to one.) Many came to this position out of sincere belief, but surely all were aware that the administration's position was overwhelmingly unpopular in their districts.

One scene I witnessed this winter manages to illustrate the Democrats'—and Gore's—dilemma. The setting was the town square in Nashua, New Hampshire, on the Saturday before February's primary. On one side of the square were United Auto Worker activists (chiefly retirees: there are no better Democratic activists than the old Reutherites), holding up signs and blowing whistles for Al Gore. On the other side of the square were college students, come from up and down the East Coast, holding up signs and tooting horns for Bill Bradley. The two groups jockeyed warily for position, but after a while they started talking and discovered that they agreed with each other—and disagreed with their respective candidates—on trade. In the year 2000, the real dividing line in the Democratic Party, so to speak, isn't vertical, between presidential candidates. It's horizontal, dividing the party's financial superstructure—and its presidential nominee—from its activist base.

On less global matters, Gore does distance himself from Republican positions in general and the W.'s positions in particular. On Social Security, Bush would allow workers to put some of their payroll tax into private retirement accounts—thereby reducing the fund for current retirees' benefits by an estimated $1 trillion in the first ten years. Nor has the W. proposed any way to make good on that annoying trillion. Gore would leave Social Security intact, but establish a new program enabling workers to set aside additional money in tax-free accounts that the government would more than match for the poorest workers and partially match for more affluent ones. Gore would expand Medicare to cover prescription drugs; Bush would change it to a system that subsidizes the recipients' purchase of cheap health insurance, but only partially subsidizes their purchase of really good health insurance.

At some point this summer, the realization that Gore needed a more populist message—that wearin' work clothes would not in itself be sufficient—seemed finally to have penetrated his campaign's strategic thinking, which throughout the spring wasn't so much misguided as it was nonexistent. Thus he's gone after industries like pharmaceuticals that are poll-tested bad guys. He's linked W. to the inaction of the Republican Congress, which he's called the "do-nothing Congress of the 21st century." The phrase, of course, comes from Harry Truman, and if Gore is echoing Truman, that's because he finds himself in much the same predicament Truman did during his 1948 campaign. Truman had to beat back a left-wing challenge from his vice-presidential predecessor, Henry Wallace, who was polling as high as 12 percent in the spring of 1948; this he did by running a surprisingly populist and liberal campaign. Gore must beat back a similar challenge from Ralph Nader, who has double-digit polling in several key states.

Ralph Nader's support this year hasn't reached beyond a narrow slice of the electorate, but his message has broadened well beyond any of the causes with which he's hitherto been identified. Traditionally, Nader has been uncomfortable discussing subjects much beyond those related to corporate power, but he has come to understand that a presidential candidate must address a wider range of concerns. Hence, he is the one candidate in the field who attacks the feasibility, the wisdom, and the very idea of building an anti-missile system. His stump speech calls for cutting the Pentagon budget; and in an interview I conducted with him shortly before the Green Party Convention, he advocated both civilian review boards and particular kinds of training as means to remedy the police misconduct that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

has shaken numerous American cities.

More important, Nader's critique of what ails us goes beyond his old attacks on the corporate sector to a scathing indictment of the entire money culture. He talks about the effect of marketing on children; about the literal dehumanization of services accessed by telephone; about the trivialization of ratings-driven newscasts and the waning of the public sphere.

Politics abhors a vacuum, and both Nader and the Greens have responded to the rightward movement of the Democratic Party by occupying much of the space that the erstwhile party of the New Deal and the Great Society has abandoned. In his speech accepting the Greens' nomination, Nader laid out the standard against which to measure the meager level of social provision and rights in America—and it was the welfare states of post–World War II Europe, chiefly the creation of social democratic parties and movements.

NADER STILL retains his idiosyncrasies, both political and personal. Asked by a reporter to name three things he liked about America, he cited as number two the torts system—which I seriously doubt any other left leader in the nation would rank so high. Then again, Nader is shifting gears, rather late in his career, from an advocate and public interest lobbyist (who once said he'd rather have ten good lawyers working for him than a thousand untrained volunteers) to a movement leader despite himself. In a sense, he is transforming himself from Thurgood Marshall to Martin Luther King, Jr., which can't be easy. At once diffident and arrogant, Nader has about as unpolitical a manner and personality as anyone in public life. Indeed, he seems the one political figure in America who's even more uncomfortable around people than Al Gore.

Nader has a range of responses when people ask him to assess the risk of denying Gore the presidency. The two parties, he asserts, are a duopoly, barely distinguishable from one another. Ask him about the difference between a Bush and Gore administration on the question of Supreme Court appointments, and he'll say, as he did in his interview with me, that Republican presidents appointed Earl Warren, William Brennan, John Paul Stevens, Harry Blackmun and David Souter, while John Kennedy appointed Byron "Whizzer" White. This is a highly selective list, of course, and hardly an assurance that the W.—a Texas conservative who chose Dick Cheney as his running mate, and whose favorite current justice is Antonin Scalia—will go with a moderate. When I asked Nader if he was concerned that the court, in a series of five-to-four decisions, was increasingly nullifying federal legislation granting rights to certain categories of people because they thought this was properly the business of state governments, Nader responded with an unusual defense of states' rights. "Don't we want states' rights in the torts system?" he began. "We have people in Congress who want to federalize the common law of torts, make it controlled by PAC-greased senators and legislators who never see a client, the people in court, the way the judges and juries do."

"There's never been a retrenchment in civil rights since the Dred Scott decision," he continued. "These things are not going to be pulled back—and if they are, it would probably be the greatest source of a revival in civic action in our generation."

Of course, if we started bombing Vietnam again, it would be the greatest source of a revival in antiwar activity in a generation, too. That doesn't make it a good thing to put in power people who are inclined to do it.

MORE BROADLY, Nader lacks the courage of his conviction in the indistinguishability of the two parties, because he also argues that his campaign will help the Democrats retake the House by bringing out voters who'll vote for him and vote Democratic on the down-ticket offices. He concedes that it makes a difference whether Tom DeLay or Dick Gephardt runs the House: "Not in anything affirmative. In the sense that it relieves us of time we don't have to expend to fight bad things that the Democrats would not initiate, like tort reform." Why lesser-evilism is permissible for lesser offices than the presidency is something Nader hasn't explained, though he does assert that Gephardt and whip David Bonior "are a little bit more like traditional liberal Democrats," (considerably understating Bonior's liberal credentials) while "Gore is mush."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nader's last assertion, at least, is incontestable. Gore is indeed mush, the Democrats have indeed lost their ideological compass and are increasingly embracing the values of the market—though there are, of course, numerous Democratic exceptions to this rule. For his part, Nader is espousing a panoply of viewpoints and positions with which the readers of *Dissent* (and the author of this piece) surely agree, and his candidacy is an all-too-rare opportunity to put those perspectives before the American people (well, some of the American people, since most of them aren't listening to Gore and Bush, who get a lot more coverage than Nader). Moreover, Nader's candidacy has already forced Gore to take a more populist tack—which is likely to help Gore come November. There is, in short, a *realpolitik* justification for the Nader candidacy.

But not enough of one.

THERE IS, as I've noted, good reason to be far less sanguine about Bush's court picks than Nader suggests. (He's surely right that Gore's appointments would be uniformly centrist, but that's no assurance that Bush's would be.) Second, and just as important, is the difference between the two main candidates on the subject of unions. It's true that on trade-related matters, Gore doesn't look much better than Bush—but on every other union-related matter, they are poles apart. Gore calls for tripling damages on employers who violate labor laws to thwart union organizing drives and has endeavored to curtail federal contracts to companies that engage in such practices. In 1998, he raised funds to defeat California's Proposition 226, which would have greatly curtailed union political action programs (and, yes, hurt the Democrats at the polls, but I see nothing wrong with Gore asserting his self-interest when it coincides with that of working people).

As for Bush, it's clear that the chief strategic political goal of his administration would be to bust unions. It's not just that the Bush-Cheney ticket has won more business support than any ticket in years. More immediately, since John Sweeney won the AFL-CIO presidency in 1995, the unions' political action programs have become tremendously more effective, mobilizing more members and exhibiting more smarts than labor has in decades. Unions also mobilize more members and exhibit more smarts than any other constituency in the Democrats' orbit; they are the reason the Democrats have crept steadily back from the wipe-out of 1994; and by curtailing the unions' campaigns, a Bush administration would cripple the electoral capacity of the Democratic Party. Plus which, there isn't a Texas Republican alive who doesn't hate unions. The reason the AFL-CIO endorsed Gore in October of last year, one former federation official told me at the time, wasn't that Gore was terrific—he wasn't—but rather that, "if Bush wins, we're in a world of shit."

So we have the candidate who articulates and personifies the spirit of Seattle. And we have the movement that was the linchpin of the Seattle coalition, that has become the *sine qua non* of American progressivism today, which fears it will be fiercely attacked—just as it's getting off its deathbed—unless Al Gore defeats George W. Bush. If I have to choose—and I do—I think the left can survive a poor finish by its candidate a lot more easily than it can survive its most important movement coming under fierce, just possibly terminal, attack.

Whether Gore could prevail even if Nader were not in the race remains a very iffy question. As a general rule, Democrats don't win when it's nap time in America. The candidate of choice for a sleepy-time nation is the W., himself a proud and accomplished napper. The notion that stately, deliberate Al Gore has it within himself to rouse a nation seems—well, improbable, though not impossible. One can only hope that he harbors a faint ancestral memory of progressive-populism, that it's encoded, somewhere, in his genes.

Postscript: Well, maybe it *is* encoded in his genes. In his convention acceptance speech, Vice President Gore dared to suggest that the most significant Al in his life may not be Democratic Leadership Council president Al From, but his father, New Dealer Albert Gore. To the consternation of both the Bush campaign and the DLC, Gore has recast himself as a neopopulist. This latest transformation may tell us hardly anything about the shape of a Gore presidency, but it tells us a great deal about the shape of Gore's candidacy—particularly since

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it seems to have given him a lead over the W. for the first time ever.

Gore's challenge this fall may best be visualized if you imagine him as a bowler facing a 7-10 split. On the left side of the lane is the Democratic base, which the veep needs to prod into action, along with a couple of million voters still choosing between Gore and Nader. On the right side of the lane, equally as critical to Gore's chances, are swing voters—more precisely, two different groups of swing voters. There are the upscale, culturally liberal, economically conservative New Economy voters whom the DLC insists hold the key to both Democratic victory and the Future of History. There are also the downscale voters of the white working class, who remain, as Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers demonstrate in their new book, *America's Forgotten Majority*, much the largest bloc of voters even amid the current prosperity. (Ed. Note: See "Fool's Gold of the Left," by Ruy Teixeira, *Dissent*, Summer 2000.)

If the ten-pin that Gore targets is the upscale independent, however, he cannot knock down the seven-pin, too. A campaign that emphasizes the Clinton-Gore boom isn't likely to swell inner-city turnout or convert wavering Naderites. The only option left to Gore is a moderately populist campaign that addresses itself both to liberal desires and downscale needs: to creating a prescription drug benefit and greater health coverage, to attacking pharmaceutical companies and HMOs. No other shot can get Gore both the pins he needs.

Gore was already espousing these positions in the weeks before the convention. What changed in Los Angeles was the explicitness with which he took the side of working-class America. "I'm happy that the stock market has boomed and so many businesses and new enterprises have done well," Gore said in his acceptance speech. "But my focus is on working families—people trying to make house payments and car payments, working overtime to save for college and do right by their kids."

The key constituency targeted by Gore's strategists (most especially Stan Greenberg, his new pollster) is white working-class women: thus his campaign's other emphasis, on Gore as the model husband and pop. The Bush campaign has also long viewed these voters as the crucial swing constituency; it was for them that all this compassionate conservative stuff was cranked out. Now, Gore's family-style populism seems to have wooed them away: the great majority of Gore's post-convention surge has come among women voters in households making between $20,000 and $50,000 annually.

This has greatly upset the W.'s handlers, but their anxiety is as nothing next to the DLC's, whose entire cosmology is threatened by a successful Democratic campaign not targeted to wired workers. "Attacking oil companies and pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies [coincidentally, industries that are heavy DLC contributors] will not win elections, I guarantee you," Al From recently prophesied. One cannot reasonably anticipate that Al Gore will govern as a latter-day William Jennings Bryan. But simply by upsetting Al From, he has already exceeded expectation. •

HAROLD MEYERSON is editor of the *L.A. Weekly*.

Check out our Web site at www.dissentmagazine.org

Also, please note our e-mail addresses:
EDITORIAL INQUIRIES: editors@dissentmagazine.org
SUBSCRIPTIONS: orders_dissent@fulcoinc.com
CUSTOMER SERVICE: custsvc_dissent@fulcoinc.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Cracking Washington Consensus

Mark Levinson

STARTING IN the early 1980s, fashionable opinion held that unfettered free markets, a reduced role for the state, and integration into the global economy provided the best formula for development. International financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), pressed developing countries to conform to the formula as a condition of their loans. In policy circles, this formula came to be known as the "Washington Consensus." Today the consensus is breaking up. Its legitimacy is declining in the face of slow economic growth, crippling instability in global financial markets, growing inequality, and the degradation of working conditions for large numbers of people.

Since 1980, economic growth rates for the developing world (with the exception of East Asia, which did not follow the Washington Consensus) have been much worse than in the two previous decades. A study from the Center for Economic Policy Research concludes that "there is no region of the world that the Bank or Fund can point to as having succeeded through adopting the policies that they promote—or in many cases—impose on borrowing countries."

For more than a decade, the World Bank and the IMF have forced governments to open their stock and financial markets to short-term investments from the West. Capital poured in from pension and mutual funds, generating short-term growth. As a result, financial markets were dominated by sudden and rapid flows aimed at profiting from speculation. The growth in the scale of speculation relative to other transactions has been particularly pronounced in the foreign exchange markets. In 1971, just before the collapse of the Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system, about 90 percent of all foreign exchange transactions were for the finance of trade and long-term investment; only about 10 percent were speculative. Today, those percentages are reversed; speculation makes up over 90 percent of all transactions.

The unregulated flow of private capital produces extreme volatility. In Mexico, foreign money, flowing massively into the country following implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in early 1994, reversed course at the end of the year. Uncontrolled capital flight led to devaluation of the currency—and to a collapse of the economy that could only be halted through a fifty-billion-dollar rescue package led by the United States.

The crisis was short-lived for investors. But it had far-reaching effects on the Mexican people, reducing real wages for workers by 25 percent. The share of the population living on less than $2.80 a day increased to 38 percent.

The Mexican experience was repeated on a still larger scale in 1997, when another round of failing investor confidence, devaluation, and capital flight caused immense damage in a number of East and Southeast Asian countries. The worst-affected among them sustained huge losses: in 1998, Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 9 percent, Thailand's by 8 percent, and South Korea's by 6 percent. And even though some of these countries have bounced back, millions of their people have not. Poverty increases rapidly when an economy contracts in a crisis—the poverty rate doubled in both Korea and Indonesia, and average living standards fell more than 20 percent in both countries—but decreases much more slowly when the economy recovers.

There has, in fact, been little progress in reducing global poverty. Although poverty rates are down in some regions, they are up in others, often spectacularly. Outside of China, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

number of poor increased from 916 to 992 million between 1990 and 1998.

These trends have led to an increasingly effective citizen backlash against Washington Consensus-style globalization. Dissension is growing even within the ranks of the international finance and trade organizations.

Take, for example, the recent controversies within the World Bank. The Bank occupies a unique position in setting the agenda for development policy. It is the world's largest employer of economists, and the volume of research on development done at the Bank is far greater than it is anywhere else in the world.

First, there is the case of Joseph Stiglitz, formerly the Bank's chief economist. According to Stiglitz, after Thailand's devaluation in July 1997, when that country's financial crisis was triggering a depression—a severe downturn that would soon spread to Indonesia, South Korea, and Hong Kong—he recommended stimulatory policies to counter the decline. Instead, the IMF chose the exact opposite course, directing the beleaguered Asian countries, as a condition for getting the bailout loans, to raise interest rates and reduce government spending, including the all-important food and fuel subsidies.

These measures were necessary, the Fund argued—this is the core of the Washington Consensus—to restore overseas investor confidence, stabilize falling exchange rates, and attract capital. But the high interest rates forced even sound companies in Thailand and Indonesia to the wall, which didn't re-inspire foreign investors. At the same time, the sharp cuts in government spending stimulated violence across Indonesia, which did not build confidence, either.

Stiglitz was also critical of Western policy toward Russia, arguing that the crash privatization program, in a country with no working democratic, legal, or financial regulatory system, created a corrupt new oligarchy that blocks economic growth. He is particularly biting about the IMF's 1998 Russian bailout. "You put in six billion dollars . . . that enables the oligarchs to take out six billion dollars in capital flight the next day. Clearly the country is worse off, and everybody knew it was going to happen."

Stiglitz claimed that when he raised doubts in house "it was like hitting your head against the wall." Stiglitz finally left the World Bank, disgusted by advisers—"market Bolsheviks" he called them—who believed in a fundamental doctrine and tried to force entire societies to conform to it.

But turmoil at the Bank goes beyond Stiglitz. Among its innumerable studies, the most influential is the annual *World Development Report (WDR)*. Every year the *WDR* focuses on one particular aspect of development policy. This report sets the terms for public discourse, shapes the Banks' own policies, and influences many national governments. In the 1980s, for instance, the *WDR*s argued against state enterprises and in favor of trade liberalization.

The 2000/01 *WDR* focuses on fighting poverty. The last time the Bank addressed this issue was in 1990, and that report has been a touchstone for Bank policy over the past decade. The process of producing the *WDR* was new this year. For the first time a draft of the report was made available on the Internet, and it became the subject of a discussion in which more than 1,500 people were involved.

Before the publication of the final draft,* the economist writing this year's report, Ravi Kanbur, resigned. Reports indicated that he did so because the Bank, with the active involvement of the U.S. Treasury Department, wanted to re-shape the message emerging from the early draft. I don't know the real reason behind Kanbur's resignation (he has not spoken publicly since he stepped down), but it isn't hard to imagine why the draft report would make many at the Bank and the Treasury Department uncomfortable.

The draft 2000 report must be read in the context of Bank policy. The 1990 report argued that economic growth was the best way to reduce poverty: market liberalization was the best way to achieve growth; export-oriented growth was best because it developed labor-intensive industries, and governments could help by investing in education and health care. All that developing-country governments had to do was to pass an education and health budget and sign World Trade Organization (WTO) agree-

*As I write in August the final report has not been issued.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ments to liberalize. They could forget about schemes to redistribute income. The report offered a neoliberal heaven in which poverty reduction went together with market liberalization and small government.

Kanbur's draft raises serious doubts about this program. First, it suggests developing countries need to be much more careful about the way they approach market liberalization. They need to do more than just throw open the door. They need to work on institutional change to make markets work for everybody, not just the powerful. They need to give people time to adjust. They need to install social protection to limit the inevitable costs. They need to pay attention to inequality. Market liberalization is no longer easy and magically effective. It's difficult, dangerous, and costly.

Second, implicit in the draft recommendations is the belief that governments have an important role to play in development. They have to become more capable at managing liberalization, providing social protection, understanding and controlling risks, and building social capital.

Third, the World Bank needs to rethink its role. The report suggests that the Bank might be a lot more effective in countering poverty by working on international public goods (that is, commodities, services, or resources with benefits that cross borders, such as international economic stability, health research, and environmental improvement) and giving countries more autonomy to run their own poverty programs.

Finally, and most important, the report raises the issue of the powerlessness of the poor. It laments their lack of assets, including their lack of political access. The argument is not pushed very far, but it is remarkable that it is raised at all.

What will survive in the published *WDR* no one knows. But this episode demonstrates that critics of Bank policy are being heard inside the Bank even if powerful forces are still hostile even to moderate challenges to the dominant views on development.

As the Washington Consensus fades, there is an opening for a long overdue debate on development. Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has argued that development should be understood as the expansion of freedoms that ordinary people enjoy. In this view, freedom to take advantage of economic opportunities, to participate in the political process, and to gain access to basic social services are necessary steps in the path toward development; the expansion of these freedoms also serves as a measure of a country's development. For Sen, freedom is both the principal means to, and the primary end of, development.

This conception of development implies a very different set of rules to guide the global marketplace. As Sen explains:

> The governmental response to acute suffering often depends on the pressure that is put on it, and this is where the exercise of political rights (voting, criticizing, protesting, and so on) can make a real difference...While this connection is clearest in the case of famine prevention, the positive role of political and civil rights applies to the prevention of economic and social disasters generally.....*To concentrate only on economic incentives (which the market system provides) while ignoring political incentives (which democratic systems provide) is to opt for a deeply unbalanced set of ground rules* [emphasis added].

Current agreements (such as NAFTA) and institutions (like the WTO, IMF, World Bank) regulating the global economy all function with a "deeply unbalanced set of ground rules." They all contain elaborately detailed protections for property, corporations, and investors. They do not protect labor rights. Even Charlene Barshevsky, the U.S. trade representative, has called the notion that labor rights should be disconnected from trade "intellectually indefensible." And President Bill Clinton has acknowledged the common-sense proposition that labor rights should be enforced with trade sanctions, just as investor rights are.

Defenders of orthodoxy charge that linking human rights to trade is simply disguised protectionism. Thus, Jagdish Bhagwati attacked the WTO protesters as people who were "[taking] aim at the poor." According to Paul Krugman they were "denying opportunity to third-world workers."*

*Not all economists agree with Krugman and Bhagwati. According to Dani Rodrik, "I see no argument that would make it appropriate for some governments to deny their citizens basic political rights such as freedom of speech,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bhagwati, Krugman, and others who claim that linking worker rights to trade is anti-poor fail to make a crucial distinction. It is legitimate for a country to attract investment because it is poor and its wages are low. It is not legitimate for the government of a country, acting in concert with multinational corporations, to suppress wages by violating internationally recognized worker rights.

LISTEN TO voices from the South. Gibson Sibanda, president of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions put it this way: "They tell us that African trade unions will be used by the trade unions of the industrialized countries to undermine the comparative advantages of African workers. It is vital that we insist that this is a question of fundamental human rights, and has nothing to do with protectionism." "We are not asking for the moon," said G. Rajasekaran, general secretary of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress, "but very basic things. Worker rights that are already universally endorsed, but simply not enforced." "What we want," Zwelinzima Vavi, general secretary of the South African trade union confederation, COSATU, argues, is to "link worker rights to trade rules to change the balance of forces for workers in the developing countries."

Do worker rights matter? Tom Palley, an economist at the AFL-CIO, identified seventeen countries that reformed their freedom of association laws and examined their economic performance in the five years before and after the changes. On average, GDP growth and manufacturing output increased while export growth decreased, which Palley suggests is a result of increased domestic demand. In another study of more than seventy countries, Palley shows that freedom of association is linked to higher wages, improvements in political governance, reduced levels of corruption, and improved income distribution.

An alternative development agenda requires more than labor rights. Debt relief, exchange rate policies, the regulation of capital flows, new international institutions, and a global tax on foreign currency transactions should all be explored. But an alternative to the Washington Consensus must have an international constituency. The issue of empowerment, or rights, is the issue that can unite workers in the developed countries with their counterparts in the developing world. ●

the right to vote and stand for political office, or freedom of association. If there is one area where [World Bank and IMF] institutional conditionality is both appropriate and of great economic value it seems to me that this is it." And Joseph Stiglitz makes a similar point, "By becoming advocates of stronger workers' rights and representation at every level. . .I believe that we can achieve much more than improvements in efficiency. Labor unions and other genuine forms of popular self-organization are key to democratic economic development."

MARK LEVINSON is chief economist at the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Emplyees (UNITE).

To Our Contributors

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your manuscript. And please remember that we can't consider articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article. We will not consider manuscripts submitted simultaneously to several publications.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. Please use inclusive language so that we don't have to make adjustments during editing. If you are submitting to *Dissent* electronically, our e-mail address is editors@dissentmagazine.org.

(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

THE EDITORS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Labour and the Destruction of Social Democracy

Shalom Lappin

When the official results of the last national election in the United Kingdom were announced in bright spring sunshine on May 2, 1997, it seemed that the long night of Conservative Party rule was finally at an end. Tony Blair's Labour Party had celebrated one of the largest landslides of the century with a majority of 178 seats, and the Tories had been reduced to a comparatively small opposition faction. Almost eighteen years of continuous Conservative government had inflicted serious economic instability and massive social devastation on the country. Years of severe underfunding had ravaged the health and educational systems, as well as blighting the public transportation networks of the major cities, particularly in London. The sustained attack that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had waged against welfare programs and public pensions sharply increased the level of poverty. Strict monetarist policies had produced high interest and exchange rates over a good part of the 1980s. These policies played a major role in de-industrializing the British economy and reducing exports, while promoting short-term speculation in financial and property markets as the new focus of the economy. The labor unions had been reduced from their once (in some cases, excessively) powerful role in collective bargaining to largely ineffective organizations that could do little more than lament the forced march to unregulated and increasingly temporary labor markets. Britain had achieved one of the highest levels in the West for disparity of income distribution between the top and bottom of its income scale. Privatization of publicly owned services and assets had become an ideological obsession pursued as a good in itself, often without regard to economic or social consequences.[1] It was, then, with high expectations of reconstruction and reinvestment that Blair's supporters greeted his new government.

In the year before the election, Blair imposed a new centrist direction upon the Labour Party. He broke its association with militant unionism and repackaged it as a modern, business-friendly party committed to fiscal prudence and moderate reform. To emphasize the depth of the change, he described it as the New Labour Party and characterized his policy orientation as the "third way," which he situated between the interventionism of traditional social democracy and the radical free market view of neo-conservatism. He sought the backing of the right-wing tabloid press and cultivated the support of Rupert Murdoch, one of its most powerful financial figures. Many of Labour's supporters interpreted these moves as necessary concessions to an electorate and a business community that had been frightened in previous elections by Labour's pro-union past, as well as by successful anti-Labour campaigns mounted by the popular press. They expected him to return to a recognizable version of Labour's classic agenda after his convincing electoral victory.

In fact, the notion that Blair's re-tooling of the party was a short-term election tactic was false. His government has exhibited a remarkable degree of continuity with its Conservative predecessors in most areas of economic and social policy in its first three years of office.

In its initial two years in power, New Labour adhered to the stringent fiscal constraints of the previous government, led by John Major. In fact, it even underspent its allocated budgets in several ministries, achieving the lowest rate of public sector investment (0.8 percent of gross domestic product [GDP]) for any UK administration in more than thirty years.[2] The result was the continued deterioration of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

public services, most notably in the National Health Service (NHS), education, and transportation. Blair and Gordon Brown, the chancellor of the exchequer (minister of finance), justified this policy as necessary to reduce a large deficit that they had inherited from the Conservatives. They were also eager to establish their credibility as a party of prudent management with the financial markets and the banks in the City of London.

In his July 2000 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), Brown provided a very substantial increase in government spending over the next four years (a total of forty-three billion British pounds), much of it directed to the NHS and education. This move was, in part, a response to widespread criticism of Labour's failure to reinvest in the public sector and to the serious decline in the government's popularity in the months leading up to the CSR announcement. Although this increase in funds is a welcome development, it is important to recognize that its net effect will be to restore government spending to the general level that it had reached in 1993 under the previous Conservative government (approximately 39 percent of GDP). This can be seen clearly in the education budget, which had fallen in the first three years of New Labour from 5.5 percent of GDP in 1993 (UNESCO statistics) to 4.6 percent in 1999. It is now projected to reach 5.4 percent in 2004 (the latter two figures from "Mr. Brown's Bold Boost," the *Guardian*, July 19, 2000). The increase will still leave the United Kingdom at the low end of the 1996 European Union (EU) average (excluding the UK) of 5.5 percent of GDP devoted to education (UNESCO). Similarly, government spending on health declined from 5.8 percent of GDP in 1993 to 5.6 percent in 1999 (UK National Office of Statistics). The planned increase in NHS funding will bring health expenditure to 7.6 percent of GDP by 2003-2004, but this will still fall short of the current EU average of between 8 percent and 8.6 percent (source: Labour Party headquarters, London). New Labour's strategy has been to freeze public spending in real terms and build up a large budget surplus (fifteen billion British pounds for 1999-2000) during the first three years of its government and then to provide large injections of funding to return to the previous levels of public expenditure in preparation for the next election. There is no evidence to suggest that this represents a long-term commitment to a significant expansion in public spending on services and poverty relief beyond that observed under the Conservatives.

In addition to tight spending, the government has maintained comparatively high interest rates (an average of approximately 6 percent over the past three years, twice that in the European Monetary Union [EMU] zone) by strictly enforcing a low rate of inflation (2.5 percent). As a consequence, the pound has soared in value relative to the constituent currencies of the Euro, rising 22 percent against the German mark in the past three years. These developments have generated conditions not at all dissimilar to those that prevailed in the late 1980s under Thatcher. The United Kingdom is experiencing a second round of de-industrialization in which factories in the north and the midlands face serious cutbacks or closure because of their inability to compete with lower-cost products from continental Europe. Manufacturing is falling below 25 percent of GDP, and Britain's exports are declining steeply while the countries of the EMU zone are in the midst of an export-led recovery. On the other hand, as in the late eighties, the high pound and investment tax incentives have produced a boom in the financial and property markets in London and the southeast. Regional disparity in wealth and employment have continued to grow.

New Labour's monetarist fervor is not simply the expression of caution on the part of a leadership traumatized by eighteen years of opposition. It is part of a well-worked-out view of politics and the economy that defines Blair's version of the third way. This view is clearly revealed in the zeal with which the government continues to pursue privatization of public services in the face of widespread opposition and in the absence of any clear economic motivation for these transfers. John Prescott, the deputy prime minister responsible for transport, has been promoting partial privatization of the national air traffic control system and of the London subway system or Underground. If his plans are imple-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mented, Britain will be one of the only countries in the world to entrust these components of its transportation framework to companies whose function is to earn profits for their shareholders.

The privatization of Britain's railways under the Conservatives has generally been recognized as a disaster. It produced a patchwork of companies that control different parts of the network in a thoroughly inefficient way. Passenger service is poor, fares are the highest in Europe, and safety standards have been compromised through lack of investment. The train companies and Railtrack, the agency responsible for maintaining tracks and stations, have focused on shareholder returns rather than modernizing the system. During the election campaign, Blair promised to introduce more effective public regulation of the railway. Despite two serious rail accidents since 1997 and a continuing decline in the level of service, no substantive steps have been taken to change the regulatory regime in order to deal with these problems. Other large-scale privatizations under the Conservatives, such as the selloff of the water companies and major utilities, have yielded at best questionable improvements in service. They have invariably been accompanied by large increases in user costs and enormous windfall profits for shareholders and managers. As a result, there is considerable popular skepticism concerning the wisdom of privatizing public services.

In the case of the London Underground, opposition to the government's privatization plan was a significant factor in Ken Livingstone's victory in the London mayoral election. After Blair effectively blocked his selection as the Labour candidate, Livingstone ran as an independent and won with support across the political spectrum. His wide electoral base is remarkable given his radical past as a member of the Labour left. Livingstone presented his campaign as, in large part, a referendum on the future of the Underground. He proposed a municipal public bond issue to finance modernization of the system, which would remain entirely under public control. This program is modeled on the procedure used to rebuild the New York City subway in the 1980s. It has been endorsed by a variety of financial analysts, including Susan Kramer, the banker who ran against Livingstone as the Liberal Democrat candidate for mayor. One of the main advantages of a bond issue is that the city would be able to finance reconstruction at a considerably lower cost of borrowing than a private company, which does not have access to the low-cost loans available to government. Blair and Prescott have indicated their determination to pursue their partial privatization program despite the election result.

New Labour's fascination with Conservative ideas is not limited to the economic domain. Jack Straw, the home secretary, has surpassed his Tory predecessor, Michael Howard, in the authoritarian measures that he has adopted to restrict the entry of refugees into the country. His continued assault on asylum seekers seems to be designed largely for internal political effect. It has little to do with the number of refugees actually in the country, since Britain has experienced smaller overall growth in its refugee population and hosts fewer refugees than most other major European countries.[3]

Straw is also attempting to gut a promised freedom of information bill by incorporating wide discretionary powers for government officials that would permit them to avoid disclosure of material in a large variety of areas. This sort of stance on immigrants and civil liberties is aimed at securing New Labour's reputation as a tough-minded party, free of liberal sentimentality.

Blair's third way is essentially an exercise in kinder, gentler neoconservative politics packaged as a progressive agenda for a reconstructed "left." It is, moreover, a particularly extreme instance of a tendency that has been embraced with varying degrees of enthusiasm by many social democratic parties in the West, including those in Germany, France, and Holland.

One of the main factors driving this trend is the view that the rapid growth of global financial markets and free trade are generating competitive pressures that render interventionist economic policies and a large public service sector unsustainable. Indeed, the rhetoric of globalization hangs heavy over New Labour. It is frequently invoked as something analogous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to a force of nature over which we have little, if any, control.[4] New Labour's guiding assumption seems to be that the best an enlightened government can do is to ease the transition into a brave new era by seeking to improve its people's capacity to compete in the emerging global marketplace and by creating optimal conditions for private investment. The nature of the new market and the demands that it imposes are non-negotiable.

There is no doubt that the expansion of global markets has had a profound impact on the world's economies, particularly in the West. The rise of foreign direct investment (FDI), the amount of foreign investment flowing into and out of a country as a percentage of its GDP, provides a measure of this process. Maiko Mikaye and Stephen Thomsen indicate in their article "Recent Trends in Foreign Direct Investment" (*Financial Market Trends* 73, June 1999) that the combined inflow and outflow of FDI as an average for countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) increased from 1 percent of GDP in 1981 to approximately 7 percent in 1998. They also point out that the United States and the United Kingdom absorbed over half of the FDI inflow for the OECD in 1998, with foreign investment doubling in the United States and increasing by 72 percent in the United Kingdom in this year. Much of this investment consisted of trans-Atlantic mergers and acquisitions where companies bought up businesses across national boundaries in Europe and the United States. Britain was the largest recipient of American investment in Europe in 1998, receiving 45 percent of its European FDI. As Mikaye and Thomsen observe, globalization is driven, in part, by a cycle in which "policy reform and technological change bring greater competition at a global level, which in turn drives firms to expand abroad and to invest in newer technologies. Governments in turn respond by trying to increase their attractiveness to foreign direct investors through further liberalization and reform."

Liberalization and reform involve increasing the profitability of investment through deregulation of the labor market and lowering business taxes. New Labour has followed its Conservative predecessors down this route. Gordon Brown further reduced capital gains and corporation taxes in his last budget, giving Britain one of the lowest rates of business tax in the world. These moves continue the process of shifting an increasing amount of the tax burden to wage earners.[5] In this situation, significantly improving public services would require increasing taxes on middle-income earners. As this becomes increasingly difficult in political terms, New Labour, like many other governments in a similar position, has opted to reduce the public sector.

TRADITIONAL social democracy assumes a Keynsian view of markets. It regards them as artifacts shaped by social and political factors, as well as by purely economic forces. It seeks to harness the creative power of the market to generate wealth in a way that maximizes social well-being and political democracy. Unconstrained free markets cannot achieve these objectives because they invariably produce a highly unequal distribution of wealth and power. The Keynesian model counteracts these market failures by means of regulation, public provision of services that would not be universally accessible if run for profit, and redistribution of wealth through the tax system. In addition, organized labor provides a balance to the power of capital to determine wages and working conditions. New Labour regards the emerging global economy as intrinsically determined by classic free market principles, which render Keynesian policies untenable. The instruments that social democratic governments used to direct national market economies so successfully in the postwar era are increasingly ineffective when applied to business interests that can quickly relocate investment within a seamless international market.

In fact, global markets are not a force of nature but the result of free trade agreements and multilateral arrangements for liberalizing investment. Governments negotiate these agreements and enter into them in order to promote particular interests. At present, corporate business concerns and free market theorists play the central role in shaping the structure of free trade and liberalized financial markets. It does not seem to have occurred to New Labour (or to many social democratic leaders) that the only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

viable strategy for social democratic renewal is to seek to transpose the Keynesian model from the national context to the emerging global economy. To do so it is necessary to develop cooperative international institutions through which like-minded social democratic governments can impose the sorts of constraints required to avoid the social and environmental damage caused by the juggernaut of unrestrained global markets. Such an international neo-Keynesian approach would aim to put into effect international currency controls to prevent the sort of unbridled speculation that undermined East Asian, Russian, and Latin American economies in 1998. It would attempt to control corporate tax evasion by establishing an international tax regime that required businesses to bear a reasonable part of the tax burden in any market in which they made profits, and it would favor long-term investment in order to discourage the rapid destabilizing flow of "hot money" seeking quick returns. Effective environmental protection and fair labor laws would be essential components of this program.

The European Union would seem to offer a natural forum from which to pursue a neo-Keynesian approach to globalization. It has built up a substantial regulatory regime and a rich network of social and human rights legislation as the framework for controlling a large free trade zone in which goods, services, and labor move across national boundaries. The Conservatives have promoted a virulently anti-EU stance precisely because of their opposition to the constraints that the EU imposes on labor markets and investment. Although Blair has avoided the rhetoric of Euro skepticism, he has kept the EU at a safe distance. By pursuing monetarist policies and allowing the pound to rise sharply in value, he has effectively ruled out Britain's entry into the EMU for the foreseeable future. Rather than attempting to cooperate with the leaders of social democratic governments on the continent in order to devise a new global strategy for reform, he has lectured them repeatedly on the need to adopt the New Labour model as the route to competitiveness.

Unfortunately, most other social democratic parties have also not dealt with globalization. They have abandoned their traditional role as the agency of social constraint on the market and, like New Labour, they have become instead the impresarios of "modernization." The business of resisting the new economy has been left to the disparate extra-parliamentary opposition that demonstrated at the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle and at the meeting of the World Bank in Washington. The groups that make up this opposition understand the severe economic and ecological dislocations that the new economy is producing. However, they have no coherent proposal for dealing with them. The simple-minded protectionist alternatives that they frequently suggest are in no way viable. Expansion of trade is a necessary condition for creating the new wealth needed to alleviate poverty and promote development both in the third world and in the West. But if global markets are not subjected to democratic political control, then they will be a source of increasing instability, rising inequality, and continuing environmental destruction. The future of the social democratic project depends upon the capacity of the democratic left to redefine it in international terms in order to provide a serious political response to these challenges. The vapid rhetoric of the third way and the modified neoconservatism of New Labour are costly distractions from this task. ●

Shalom Lappin is professor of computational linguistics in the Department of Computer Science at King's College, London.

[1]See Will Hutton, *The State We're In* (Vintage, 1996) for a detailed description of this period of Tory government.

[2] Larry Elliott, "Sky's the Limit," citing UK Treasury statistics, the *Guardian* (May 10, 2000).

[3]According to statistics provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of recognized refugees in Britain in 1998 was 116,000; in France, 140,200; in Germany, 949,200; in Sweden, 178,800; and in the Netherlands, 131,800.

[4] See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), and *The Reith Lectures* (BBC, 1999) where globalization is portrayed as the inevitable consequence of unstoppable technological innovation.

[5] See George Monbiot, "The mobile economy," the *Guardian* (March 23, 2000).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gay Rights and Civil Unions

The French Debate

Frédéric Martel

In recent years, the recognition of gay couples has become a public question in many Western democracies. Approaches differ depending on history, culture, and laws, yet few countries have passed general laws dealing with gay unions. Although French republicanism and the French model of "republican integration" are conventionally "blind to differences," the French legislature last year approved a "civil union agreement," the *Pacte civile de solidarité* (PACS). This law gives a new status to unmarried couples, heterosexual and homosexual. More than thirty thousand such agreements have been signed since the law went into effect in November 1999.

Origin of the PACS

In 1981, discrimination against gays was still enshrined in French law. The age of consent for heterosexual couples was fifteen, for homosexual couples, eighteen; police kept surveillance files on people who had sex with someone of the same gender; laws required civil servants and tenants to behave like "good family men"; and films and books were censored. After the left came to power, with the election of François Mitterrand in 1981, things changed. In less than two years, laws were revised, police files expurgated, censorship abolished, and the law became officially neutral with respect to sexuality. But although legal discrimination was done away with, the law did not recognize, define, or even acknowledge homosexuality. France thus gave no positive recognition to "difference" in this sense. In Mitterrand's words, "homosexuality was no longer an offense."

Although 1981 to 1983 saw the legal "normalization" of homosexuality, it was not until the 1990s that the demand for recognition of gay couples achieved prominence. A principle motivating force for this change—though not the only one—was the AIDS epidemic. AIDS revealed many forms of discrimination as homosexuals were rejected by their dead partners' families or evicted from the apartments they had shared. Legislation for all unmarried couples (not only gay ones) was needed simply because of their numbers and particularly because activists of the May 1968 era were reaching retirement age. Between 1995 and 1997 the debate attracted so much media attention that the new left-wing government of Lionel Jospin was compelled to act.

But how to act? Should gay marriage be allowed, as some gay activists in the United States demand? Should the legislature extend past cohabitation laws to homosexual couples, in order to supersede several negative decisions of the Cour de Cassation (roughly equivalent to the U.S. Supreme Court)? Should there be a specific status for gay couples, as in Denmark, a kind of legal framework protecting them and particular to them?

Marriage was dismissed because nearly all deputies in the National Assembly were opposed to it. Also, public opinion surveys showed a majority of the population to be hostile to the idea, and the French gay community was not really asking for it in large numbers. Laws on cohabitation alone were not adopted because they would not provide gay couples with a real contract or recognition of their union—only an inadequate acknowledgment of it. Finally, any specific status for gay couples was vigorously rejected because it would inevitably have been seen as second-class status and the source of future discrimination. In any event, French constitutional jurisprudence would probably have blocked such legislation; in France it is not possible to grant benefits or legal status on ethnic, cultural, or sexual grounds, only on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"social" or "geographical" ones. For example, aid can be provided to a category of workers containing many immigrants or to a school in an area in which immigrant workers are in fact a majority, but never to immigrants as such.

After long consideration and extended bargaining, the Jospin government finally decided to create a new legal status for all unmarried couples, and this became PACS. Anyone who entered into such an agreement would have access to housing rights (for example, property transfers), public benefits (for example, health coverage, welfare), labor rights (for example, vacation time), the right to file a joint tax return, certain residence and naturalization rights, and rights of inheritance. Discussion of PACS in the National Assembly between October 1998 and November 1999 was extremely volatile. It was vigorously opposed by the right-wing opposition and also provoked considerable hostility among elected officials (in particular from small-town mayors), harsh criticism from the Catholic church, and systematic criticism from judges, lawyers, and many intellectuals. That winter, more than a hundred thousand people demonstrated against PACS in Paris.

But PACS answered an obvious social need, and so it found many defenders. Hesitant at first, gay associations joined battle in favor of it. More than a hundred thousand people marched to support the law in Gay Pride parades in Paris in June 1997, 1998, and 1999. All segments of the left (Socialist Party, Greens, Citizens' Movement, Communist Party, Radical Left Party) backed the PACS, as did nongovernmental organizations, particularly AIDS research and activist groups, feminists, and all the human rights groups. Most unions also backed it. Finally, both the Parisian and provincial press were generally favorable. Radio and television, particularly "youth" stations, publicized it, and according to the polls, a majority of the public always favored PACS. Never before had homosexuality provoked such a wide-ranging debate. Never before had the media devoted so much attention to gays and same-sex couples. Never before had the left been so engaged in favor of gay rights.

The opposition did force some important concessions: a PACS is signed before a judge, not a mayor; it provides no rights to adoption or medically assisted procreation; joint taxation is subject to a waiting period; no rights are automatically granted to someone who enters into a PACS with a foreigner. With these concessions, the government finally succeeded in passing the law on November 15, 1999.

PACS has been popular with heterosexual couples, who make up 40 percent of the unions. It gives them genuine rights (including joint taxation and right of inheritance) without requiring them to marry. Marriage is a more restrictive and symbolically stronger act (something many post-1968 couples, of any sexual orientation, do not want). It is also very difficult to dissolve. PACS combines the advantages of cohabitation and some of the rights of marriage, without the latter's constraint. This goes some way toward explaining its success. However, PACS still needs improvements if it is to satisfy many couples. For instance, waiting periods for some rights and different percentages in inheritance rights ought to be abolished. It will be important to see if its popularity stays strong among heterosexuals.

The French "solution" was thus to propose a law that was both original and in keeping with French traditions. PACS is a universal law because it affects all unmarried couples and rejects the creation of a specific status. It is "modern" because it is not encumbered by outdated restrictions and symbols. Despite the need for improvement, it does set out multiple concrete rights. Finally, it is cautious because it avoids direct questions of family relationships and adoption. Thus it does not provoke conservative heterosexuals by interfering with questions of marriage per se. Gay marriage is a universalistic and not a communitarian position, but support for it is marginal in France and it is, for now, a risky centerpiece for gay political strategy. In the end, PACS is a compromise, but a good one that is open to further adjustment and that has provided new rights for unmarried couples.

The End of the Battle?

Some of PACS's consequences are already clear. The first is that it represented a real victory for civil rights. The logic of "equal rights" was foreign to the early French gay movement, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

preferred subversive agitation in the 1970s. Yet equal rights gradually became one of the movement's chief demands, with calls for the decriminalization of homosexual acts in the early 1980s, for intensified struggle against discrimination against the sick during the "AIDS years," and, finally, for support for the rights of homosexual couples, which took shape as PACS. The struggle for civil rights became the starting point of political mobilization and one of the most useful weapons against discrimination. The battle has not been completely won, but these efforts foster the "modernization" of French society by making it more hospitable to the "Other" and more protective of individuals, similar or different. Efforts to improve PACS will galvanize gay militants and put laws against homophobic speech and job discrimination on the agenda.

Success in the battles for rights has also produced the conditions for going beyond them. Indeed, the logic of rights has in a sense reached its limits. Some forms of discrimination cannot be undone by legal remedies. It is probable that in "post-PACS" France there must be new strategies to fight prejudice, discrimination in the familial relation, and many forms of individual denigration.

Another major effect of PACS—perhaps the most unexpected and the most disheartening—was the intensity it stirred up in its foes. Demonstrations and debates highlighted the persistence of an "official" homophobia, which in part showed up in the National Assembly. Resistance surfaced in vigorous speeches, articles, and demonstrations. PACS, its opponents insisted, threatened the family, marriage, parenthood, the symbolic order, the finances of the country, public order, and on and on. The force of this "counterrevolution" shows that homosexuality remains a deeply divisive subject in French political life and society.

But there is also a more optimistic way to read this: despite their vociferous opposition, the anti-gay forces lost the battle for public opinion (and even, to some extent, within their own political family). One might wager that the right will hesitate to reassert the subject, and that many of its deputies will even be more accepting of gay rights if it returns to power. This is, of course, a hypothesis. We still have to see if public acceptance of homosexuality is fragile or now much more solid.

Modernizing France?

By providing genuine protections for both gay and straight unmarried couples, PACS represents an expansion of individual liberties and equal rights. It was carefully tailored to fit a universal framework, but it also helped to reshape French attitudes toward "identity." The French have been pretty inhospitable to "difference." Yet, a society that says to individuals, "be yourself only in private" is a society afraid of itself. The individual is largely socialized through his or her matrimonial status (official forms often ask for details about the "spouse"). Confining homosexuality and homosexual relations to private life severely hampers the individual's social life. Neither the left nor the advocates of PACS could remain content with an idealized and abstract Republic, nor with the Jacobin solution of making everyone the same. So the left chose a forceful law that ensured for homosexuals not only tolerance, but also rights. It symbolized not the indifference of mere tolerance, but an undifferentiated recognition equal to that given to heterosexual couples. As a result, PACS joins major laws that modernized France: women's suffrage in 1944, abortion reform in 1975, abolition of the death penalty in 1981. It is a good illustration of what "concrete universals" *à la française* ought to be—something very different from the "abstract universalism" defended by rigid republicans.

This is why PACS has also curbed, at least for the moment, the "communitarian temptation" of some French gay militants. No gay group is now pushing for the creation of a specific status for gay couples. This amounts to a gay rejection of both second-class status and self-regarding identity politics. Instead, it encourages an open display of gay identity, while making gays like everyone else. The name for this is not identity but equality.

Perhaps the most important consequence of PACS is that it secured some recognition and not just rights. Unlike all previous debates on homosexuality, the PACS debate was not carried out in secret. It took place in daylight and was led by a government that, if hesi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tant at first, finally engaged in a direct public battle—led by the prime minister and a dozen other ministers, supported by three former prime ministers, and followed at all levels of government.

Whether through demonstrations of visibility (gay pride marches) or other types of identity organizations, such as gay and lesbian centers, gays have sought a combination of rights and recognition. Lack of recognition was a source of discomfort, sometimes of oppression, and always of low self-esteem. So in the end, the goal was less the idea of rights than the idea that "we exist through recognition."

The most progressive segment of the right-wing opposition is ready to allow rights for homosexuals in limited forms but refuses to go any further. PACS supporters, gay militants, and the French government favored a new legal status for unmarried couples. With respect to rights, the two approaches are perhaps not so far apart. With respect to recognition, however, PACS gives much wider scope. It fits into a broader movement and is not the only recent law to show that France is trying to change its "model of integration." New legislation will enable many more women to obtain political positions (the law on "parity"), and laws are being prepared to deal better with integration of immigrants, ethnic discrimination, and the cultural diversity of the inhabitants of Corsica and New Caledonia.

All these proposals show that France is changing. It might even be suggested that to some extent, old republican France has come to an end. Perhaps French laws will henceforth be increasingly pragmatic and more adapted to the daily realities of the men and women who live, work, and love today in the country of Montesquieu and Rousseau. ●

Translated from the French by George Holoch.

FRÉDÉRIC MARTEL is the author of *The Pink and the Black, Homosexuals in France since 1968*, recently published in the United States by Stanford University Press. A scholar and journalist, he was one of the originators of PACS and one of its advocates for the Jospin government between 1997 and 2000.

Virtuous Vice

Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere

ERIC O. CLARKE

"*Virtuous Vice* is an ambitious, subtle, and revelatory book, establishing Clarke as a major voice in queer theory and in social theory generally."
—Michael Warner, author of *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*

"The intensifying conflict between sex-radical queers and morally righteous gay citizens has lead to the ruination of contemporary sexual politics. Eric Clarke shows the way through the impasse with his viciously sharp analyses, which display the virtues of theoretical precision and historically informed scholarship. His book will transform how we think about sexuality and citizenship, about visibility, democracy, and the public sphere."—Douglas Crimp, editor of *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/ Cultural Activism*

248 pages, paper $17.95
Series Q

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Available at bookstores
www.dukeupress.edu
toll-free 1-888-651-0122

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Washington's War in Colombia

Winifred Tate

DRIVING DOWN the gutted gravel roads of Putumayo, you can't see the war. You could be in any rural tropical region of Latin America— the same wandering cattle that drift onto the road, the same teenage soccer teams in shiny polyester uniforms playing in roadside fields, the same swept dirt yards of tiny farms, overrun with chartreuse flowers and scrawny chickens. Only the silent testimony of occasional graffiti betrays the outward calm. Along the low concrete walls and across shuttered storefronts, spray paint shouts: "Army assassins! Guerrilla traitors! No to the gringo invasion!"

Putumayo is known best in the United States as the name of a world music record label and a high-end natural fabric clothing line, but it is also the name of a river, and the state the river runs through, in southern Colombia. Stretching from the Andean foothills to the Amazon jungle along the border with Ecuador, Putumayo is a frontier province, with a history of bloodshed inspired by regional conflict and international trade (British rubber companies were active here at the turn of the century). Today the conflict is fueled by the drug trade. Peasant farmers in Putumayo grow most of Colombia's coca—the raw material for cocaine. Though it was long a stronghold of the country's largest and oldest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), for the past three years right-wing paramilitary groups have steadily gained control of small towns under the protective wing of the Colombian armed forces. With congressional approval last spring of a huge aid package, the United States will be joining the fray, deploying three elite Colombian army battalions trained and equipped by the Pentagon.

Colombia has long been synonymous with drugs, and the dramatic violence associated with the Colombian drug cartels, is a staple of American popular culture from *Miami Vice* to *Get Shorty.* But the "war on drugs" is becoming more and more a real war, with billions of dollars in military aid, helicopters, guns, and training recently approved for the Andes, mostly Colombia. Unfortunately, this escalation of the war on drugs will not stem the drug trade, and may escalate the crime and bloodshed in the longest running internal conflict in Latin America.

By anyone's measure, the civil war in Colombia has been going on for a long time. Land conflicts and partisan violence between the two traditional parties in the 1950s left more than two hundred thousand people dead and forced more than one million from their homes. A power-sharing agreement to end the conflict maintained a formally democratic structure, but made political reform virtually impossible. Frustration with the closed political system in the 1960s and 1970s led to the explosion of guerrilla groups, most of which adopted variations of a Marxist line. Regional alliances between drug traffickers, local military commanders, and landowners unleashed a "dirty war" in the 1980s, in which thousands of reformist politicians, including more than two thousand members of the Patriotic Union (born of frustrated peace talks between the FARC and the government)—union leaders, peasants, and community organizers—were killed. Despite efforts at reform, including a new Constitution in 1991, the Colombian government continued to falter in the 1990s, while guerrillas and paramilitary groups grew. The country now faces the worst economic recession of the century, escalating war, and rising social discontent; any resolution of its continual crisis seems further away than ever.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Colombia and the Drug War

What is called "drug trafficking" in the United States is in fact a major, multifaceted, and global industry. Like any such enterprise, this trade involves a huge range of individuals and secondary businesses and has evolved over the past decades to respond to market pressures and demands. The role of Colombia in the drug trade has shifted over the years, from marijuana exportation in the 1970s, to cocaine processing and shipping in the 1980s, and increasing drug cultivation in the 1990s. The two largest Colombian drug cartels, dismantled in the mid-1990s, have been replaced by smaller, more vertically integrated trafficking organizations whose nimble, independent traffickers are much more difficult to detect and infiltrate.

These traffickers employ new and constantly changing shipping routes through Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean for moving cocaine and, increasingly, heroin. Some Colombian politicians have taken to calling the drug trade the mother of all evil in Colombia. In fact, the money and violence generated by drug production and trafficking magnified existing schisms and have come to fuel all the actors in the war. Drug lords have corrupted the political process and weakened already faltering democratic institutions through threats, assassinations, and bribery. Money laundering has distorted the Colombian economy and led to increasing land concentration as drug dealers buy up huge farms. The FARC has increasingly financed its activities by taxing coca crops and by protecting drug processing labs and other illicit installations. The dramatic increase in coca cultivation in southern Colombia, a FARC stronghold since the 1960s, coincided with the organization's strategic effort to increase its military capabilities in the mid-1990s.

Right-wing paramilitary groups have used profits from the drug trade to finance their dramatic expansion in the past decade as well. Since the early 1980s, drug traffickers, together with landowners and local military commanders, formed paramilitary organizations to "clean" their territory of guerrillas and alleged guerrilla sympathizers and to protect land, cattle, cocaine laboratories, and strategic shipping routes. Some paramilitary chiefs are high-level traffickers and have used drug profits to finance massacres and assassinations, killing hundreds and forcing thousands of peasants from their lands.

In recent years, cultivation of both coca and poppies (used to make heroin) has expanded enormously in Colombia. Unlike in Peru and Bolivia, where peasants have for centuries grown and chewed the coca leaf (a mild stimulant compared with processed cocaine), in Colombia this practice was limited to a very few, small indigenous groups. Coca in Colombia is grown on industrial plantations owned by absentee landlords and on small family farms alongside food crops. In all cases, the people working the land are peasants and itinerant workers, known as *raspachines*. Given the options, it's not a bad life. Day laborers earn the equivalent of U.S. $6 to $10 a day, and a family with a four-hectare plot can earn up to U.S. $15,000 a year, well above the minimum wage of U.S. $100 a month. Expenses in remote rural areas are high, but coca farming has allowed many families to send their children to school and survive in the increasingly depressed rural economy.

Most coca base, the first refining stage in making cocaine, is produced at home by the peasant families who grow the coca. (On industrial plantations, contract workers carry out a larger scale version of the same process.) The process itself is simple. Using a modified weedcutter, they shred the leaves, mix them with cement powder, then soak them in barrels of gasoline. Hydrochloric acid is added to the liquid squeezed from this mixture to crystallize the alkaloid. The resulting powder is coca base, sold in southern Colombia for about $700 a kilo. After a final refining process, cocaine is shipped north, where it sells for as much as $100 a gram on the streets.

Colombia in Washington

When Colombia's telegenic new president, Andrés Pastrana, visited Washington in October 1998, President Bill Clinton promised to expand the bilateral agenda beyond drugs to include human rights, trade, and peace. During that and subsequent visits, Pastrana requested support for the nascent peace process with the FARC and assistance for his "Marshall Plan" for southern Colombia. His proposal in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volved economic and development aid for the small farmers growing coca, in hopes that the international community would respond to the devastation caused by drug production and trafficking as it had to the devastation of Europe after the Second World War. Unfortunately, instead, Congress tripled assistance for militarized counternarcotics programs, making Colombia the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid in 1999, after Israel and Egypt.

With new interest in Colombia, numerous congressional delegations visited military installations and toured coca fields by helicopter, while high-ranking administration officials, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, met repeatedly with government officials in Bogotá. President Clinton presented the results of those meetings in January 2000. Of the $1.3 billion package for Colombia, more than 80 percent is for military aid.

Despite administration pressure, the Colombia package did not sail through Congress as expected. During the debates in the House of Representatives, critics, led by the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, argued for increased support for domestic treatment of drug abusers and against military funding for Colombia. This led to a spirited two-hour debate on the merits of U.S. counternarcotics policy. The Democratic leadership urged a reconsideration of the entire approach, focusing on demand reduction and treatment, while the Republican leadership, backed by the Clinton White House, pushed for military spending. The House approved the Colombia package with only minor revisions.

Shortly thereafter, the Senate also voted to approve the package. The most contentious issue there was not the wisdom of military aid, although a few lonely senators (Paul Wellstone and Barbara Boxer) expressed their doubts. More attention was devoted to the helicopter companies competing for the lucrative contracts that the package would generate—Connecticut-based Sikorsky, maker of the more expensive and sophisticated Blackhawk, or Texas-based Bell Technology, source of the more pedestrian Hueys. The lack of significant debate in the Senate was caused in part by the defection of some Democratic leaders traditionally strong on human rights, including Senator Christopher Dodd from Connecticut, who lobbied strongly for the Blackhawks. Some senators justified their failure to question the policy by pointing to the strong human rights conditions included in the Senate version of the bill. However, these conditions were significantly weakened in conference.

The War in Colombia

The bulk of this assistance—$600 million—is destined for the "Push into Southern Colombia." This funding will be used to train and equip elite battalions of the Colombian Army, and to provide them with helicopters and intelligence assistance. U.S. officials classify the entire Colombia proposal as counternarcotics aid, claiming that the battalions will act only against drug operations. But Colombians don't mince words. "This aid is for counterinsurgency, pure and simple," an intelligence official told me in Bogotá. Even U.S. military personnel admit the lines are blurred. According to one Pentagon official, their objective will be to "permit the Colombian government to take control of Putumayo and [the neighboring state of] Caquetá in two years."

The model for U.S. programs in Colombia is U.S. policy toward El Salvador in the 1980s. Rather than direct military intervention, the United States provides escalating assistance in the form of equipment, training, and intelligence technology, as well as advisers to elite battalions handpicked by the Special Forces. Now, however, the war on drugs has replaced communism as the driving force behind U.S. military expansion.

In 1989, President George Bush declared that the "gravest domestic threat facing our nation today is drugs," and he announced the "Andean Strategy" to reduce the amount of illicit narcotics entering the United States. This strategy dramatically increased U.S. funding for eradication programs targeting illicit crop cultivation and for military hardware and training for security forces involved in counternarcotics operations in Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia. The same year, the Department of Defense was named the "single lead agency" for the detection and monitoring of illicit drug shipments into the United States. This opened the door for an expanded role for the U.S. military, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was looking for a new mission at the end of the cold war and anxious to preserve ties with Latin American military forces. For officials with SouthCom, the U.S. military command with jurisdiction over Latin America, the drug war is an opportunity to apply the low-intensity conflict skills honed during thirty years of fighting guerrilla insurgencies and the principal means of maintaining and enhancing relations with militaries throughout the region.

The Coca Wars

Sitting in the concrete cool of a local community building, a group of farmers accompanied by a tiny, round-faced nun won't meet my eyes as they talk about the coca grown by their neighbors. Some have traveled as long as eight hours to meet me, by foot and canoe. Life for them is hard, they explain, with no roads and no doctors; pesticides sprayed from the sky are already drying up their crops. Prompted by our host, a local health promoter unleashes a flood of complaints. One man stands and summarizes their protests. "Yeah, I grow coca, and I'm not afraid to tell President Pastrana or President Clinton. I grow coca and I'm tired of all this. I'm just trying to get by with the ten hectares I've managed to earn with hard work and loans, growing plantains, yucca, and coca, and now it's all been destroyed. No one has ever come here asking why we grow coca. We don't need coca, we need money. We'd be perfectly happy to change, if you tell us you need yucca, we'll grow that and send it to the U.S. instead of coca."

Since 1996, the United States has sprayed thousands of acres of Colombia with Glyphosate, a commercial herbicide that kills a wide range of plant life, while refusing to provide any development assistance for the region. Farmers have complained that fumigation has destroyed food crops, caused respiratory illness and skin problems, and destroyed their only means of support, while the coca cultivation has simply moved into new areas, including Putumayo. A U.S. government study published in July 1999 reported that "despite two years of extensive herbicide spraying. . .net coca cultivation actually increased 50 percent."

Now, the United States is planning to intensify fumigation efforts in Putumayo. The bill passed by Congress includes aid for the victims of these efforts—$15 million "to provide shelter and employment for the Colombians who will be displaced during this push into southern Colombia." Clinton administration documents anticipate displacing ten thousand plantation workers, with four thousand small farmers remaining in the area. No one with the administration has produced an explanation for these numbers, which woefully underestimate the rural population directly involved in coca production. The mayor of one of the region's major towns told me that in his municipality alone more than six thousand families live off small coca plots, but no one asked him. "Everyone here lives off coca, absolutely everyone," a local human rights ombudsman explained. "The teachers, the storekeepers, the doctors—even church donations at Sunday mass. All that money comes from coca, because no one will buy anything else that we grow here."

This past June, thousands of peasants gathered in a public hearing in southern Colombia (part of the ongoing negotiations between the FARC and the government), to present their concerns about counternarcotics operations and offer alternatives. All their proposals focused on manual, voluntary, and gradual coca eradication, with the provision of real economic alternatives. But any comprehensive solution is difficult, requiring not only local programs but agrarian reform efforts throughout the country. Most peasants have sad stories of projects that have been tried and failed—because of lack of long-term investments, markets for the new crops, or technical assistance. In areas where economic and community development efforts are combined with sustained assistance, however, some communities have found ways out of the coca quagmire More complicated and less marketable in an election year than helicopters, these kinds of long-term solutions are rarely considered in Washington. The wasted hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid cannot compare, however, to the price Colombians will pay as the war escalates. ●

WINIFRED TATE is a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mexico's Neoliberal Transition

Douglas W. Payne

THE MARKETS were pleased when Vicente Fox won Mexico's presidential election in July: not because he had done what many still thought impossible—defeat the authoritarian machinery of the longest ruling party in the world—but because there had been no unrest, nothing to shake investor confidence. As James Nash, senior economist for Latin America at the New York Federal Reserve, explained at a conference in Washington, it mattered little which of the two top contenders won, right-wing businessman Fox or Francisco Labastida of the reigning Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), because both pledged to continue the neoliberal, free-trade policies embraced by PRI governments since the 1980s. The only concern was that the vote could be close and spark allegations of fraud, protests in the streets, the kind of thing that makes capital skittish.

So, when Fox won by a relatively comfortable margin and the PRI conceded, stocks rallied in Mexico City and New York, and the Mexican peso rose against the dollar. Dutch brokerage giant ANB AMRO, echoing firms from one financial center to the next, encouraged clients to "buy on the news" and raised Mexico to an overweight from an underweight position in its model Latin American stock portfolio. Wendy's International announced plans to expand its roster of eight fast-food franchises to more than a hundred outlets, joining a phalanx of foreign concerns poised to ramp up their stake in Mexico.

Mexican big business was no less sanguine. Fox's National Action Party (PAN) had supported the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) from the beginning, voting for the constitutional amendments the PRI needed to implement the agreement even as it continued to denounce the PRI's imperious rule. No surprise, then, that telecommunications tycoon Carlos Slim, a long-time PRI supporter who became the richest man in Latin America (according to *Forbes*) as a beneficiary of the party's privatization program, stated after the election that Fox "has the best intentions of moving Mexico forward."

The Clinton administration applauded Fox's victory as "a triumph for democracy," as if all along it had been part of the school that believed there could be no democracy in Mexico until the PRI was ousted. Given the primacy of commercialism in U.S. foreign policy since the end of the cold war, the White House surely would have endorsed a continuation of the PRI's seven-decade tenure if Labastida had won.

U.S. presidential candidates Gore and Bush, as interchangeable as Fox and Labastida when it comes to markets and trade, were caught flat-footed by the PRI's defeat. Fox aides said that prior to the vote, both had snubbed overtures from his campaign and that the tempestuous Fox was livid. They said Bush had refused to meet with Fox's daughter Ana Cristina, who will act as first lady for the divorced Fox, but had sat down with Labastida's wife in Los Angeles. Gore, meanwhile, maintained close ties with the Labastida camp through the consultant-pollster team of James Carville and Stanley Greenberg, who were working for both campaigns. It may be that Gore and Bush put too much stock in Greenberg's work in Mexico: several of his polls showed Labastida ahead while none ever showed Fox in front.

For Carville, who advised the failed Perónist candidate in the 1999 elections in Argentina, the Mexican election made it two straight losses advising Latin American political parties with histories of thuggery and graft. Part of the strategy in Mexico was to wrap Labastida, a former

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

interior minister (as in internal control), in the banner of the third way, portray him as an advocate of "an economy with a human face." Carville himself kept an uncharacteristically low profile, probably because the PRI played the nationalist card by trying to tar Fox, a descendant of Spanish and Irish immigrants, as beholden to unnamed foreign influences. So, although Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution provides for the expulsion of foreigners who interfere in Mexican politics—the PRI has used this for years to eject U.S. human rights activists from Chiapas—Carville and Greenberg were welcomed into the ruling party's brain trust.

Fox was advised for a time by Dick Morris, another consultant who gained notoriety in the Clinton stable. But Fox let Morris go in favor of homegrown strategists, some of whom went back with Fox to the 1970s when he ran Coca-Cola's Mexican and Central American operations. Still, Fox ended up running as a third wayer, too, even employing the same "economy with a human face" slogan.

Fox's WIN was bitter irony for the Mexican left, which inflicted the first body blow against the PRI when it almost certainly won the 1988 elections. With returns showing opposition leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, once a rising star in the PRI, substantially ahead, the PRI-controlled electoral body announced that the computers had crashed due to "atmospheric conditions." When the count resumed, the PRI's Carlos Salinas was declared the victor. The true count will never be known because the PAN voted with the PRI to incinerate the ballots.

The Reagan administration recognized Salinas's victory before Cárdenas could even initiate a legal challenge. The rationale was later apparent during a Pentagon workshop on Latin America, which warned that "a 'democratic opening' in Mexico could test the special relationship by bringing into office a government more interested in challenging the United States on economic and nationalistic grounds." In other words, no democratic transition would be permitted in Mexico unless there were a reliable alternative to the PRI.

The 1988 election showed how far the PRI had descended into political and economic bankruptcy. For Salinas the remedy was twofold: refinance PRI domination with foreign investment and attack the left, destroying it if possible, but at minimum making it clear that Cárdenas's Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) would never be allowed to reach Los Pinos, the Mexican White House.

The money did flow into Mexico with NAFTA, which is more an investor and property-rights protection pact than a trade agreement. Much of the proceeds went to replenish the PRI patronage engines. A great deal disappeared into PRI pockets and offshore accounts such as those in Switzerland and the Caribbean in which Salinas's brother Raúl stashed an estimated hundred million dollars.

Meanwhile, the PRI unleashed the entire repressive apparatus of the state against the PRD and its left-progressive allies among workers, peasants, and students, an assault that has abated somewhat only in recent years. During the last decade, hundreds of PRD members have been killed by Mexican security forces with impunity, at least six hundred according to the party's own count. Amnesty International's most recent annual report states, "Arbitrary detentions, torture, killings and death threats continued to be reported. The victims included peasants, indigenous people, human rights defenders and political activists."

In 1994, the PRI dug deep into the Mexican treasury to elect Salinas's successor, Ernesto Zedillo, another Ivy-educated economist. Under increasing international scrutiny, the party relied less on fraud and resorted to massive state spending in a decidedly unfair exercise. That was part of the reason why Zedillo inherited a greatly overvalued peso, which collapsed just weeks after he was sworn in. Overnight, the money in Mexican pockets lost 40 percent of its value. Interest rates soared, and the middle class, having borrowed heavily on Salinas's promise to make Mexico a first-world country, nearly drowned in debt.

Which is why younger, better educated, and urban voters became Fox's biggest backers and, in the end, put him over the top. Mexico's middle class is poor by U.S. or European norms, with many surviving on as little as $200 per month, and numerous family members

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pitching in to afford a small home and a secondhand car. But it aims for the same upward mobility as its counterparts everywhere and was drawn to Fox's promise of accountable government and high growth rates. Its members also include PRI-hating professionals, cyber-types, and assorted cosmopolitans, one of whom gushed to Reuters after Fox's victory, "I wanted to tap dance and sing 'Obla-di, Obla-da.'"

Although the middle class accounts for less than a third of the country's population, it apparently registered and turned out to vote in bigger percentages than other social groups. A U.S. team hired by Mexican businesspeople to conduct exit polls found that Fox's greatest support came from people under forty-nine, people with at least a high school education, and people who resided in urban and suburban areas. One of the pollsters said, "It was the yuppie revolution."

Still, voter turnout overall was just 64 percent, meaning that Fox, with 43 percent of the vote, actually had the support of only about one in four registered voters. Labastida received 37 percent, doing best among the old, the uneducated, and rural dwellers, traditional PRI constituencies. Cárdenas, with 17 percent, did poorly not only among the middle class and youth, but failed to connect with the large numbers of disaffected who probably longed for change but may have feared Fox's social conservatism and just stayed home.

ALTHOUGH THE government onslaught against the PRD took its toll, the party had rebounded in the 1997 mid-term elections, when Cárdenas won the race for mayor of Mexico City, the nation's chaotic, crime-ridden, and virtually ungovernable capital. But laboring in that unforgiving post for two years didn't help Cárdenas's presidential chances, and the PRI made it all the more difficult as its minions stripped city coffers and offices of everything including the wall sockets before Cárdenas arrived.

Since birth, the PRD has been a fractious amalgam of competing currents and personalities. In the run-up to the 2000 vote, it seemed to bog down amid worsening internal disputes, one of which led to the exit of Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, a former PRI heavyweight who, with Cárdenas, had co-founded the PRD. Muñoz Ledo, who has angled his entire political life to get into Los Pinos, first tried to start his own organization, then wangled a presidential nomination from a fringe party. When both schemes proved to be non-starters, he showed up at Fox's door and was taken in as adviser.

A number of other leftist figures also went over to Fox. Joel Ortega, a former communist who organized a declaration of support for Fox signed by more than two dozen leftist intellectuals, said, "The most important task is to free ourselves from PRI domination." Two of the more prominent signers were Jorge Castañeda and Adolfo Aguilar Zinzer, both former Cárdenas advisers who became part of Fox's inner circle. Castañeda told the Spanish daily *El País*, "This election is not about principles . . . . It is a referendum on change or no change."

A majority of left luminaries stayed with Cárdenas, believing that Fox could turn out worse than the PRI. Mexican historian Adolfo Gilly predicted that Fox would rule in the mold of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Carlos Menem, the flamboyant former right-wing leader of Argentina. Gilly warned that if the left supported Fox, the PRI would benefit from the inevitable discontent over Fox's economic policies, "just as the corrupt bosses of the dismantled Communist Party of Russia did when the people began to resist Boris Yeltsin's neoliberal outrages."

Others expressed abhorrence at the PAN's ideology, rooted in the Catholic conservatism of its founders, many of whom took up arms against the anticlericalism of the Mexican Revolution in the Cristero War of the 1920s. Today, in the handful of states where the PAN has won elections, the party has tried to dictate skirt lengths in public offices, and one PAN state pressured a teen to give birth after being raped.

Stung by such attacks, Fox undertook an image adjustment, aided by his new advisers from the left. He stopped displaying a banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe at his rallies, eased his position on homosexuality—which he had been referring to as a "degenerate act against human nature"—and adopted third-way language on education and health care. He even visited Fidel Castro in Havana, a gesture that might have been more significant if the Cuban

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leader's calendar wasn't already brimming with Republican congressional representatives and Fortune 500 executives.

THE DEGREE to which the split among the left may have influenced the outcome awaits deeper study. What is clear is that a majority of Mexican voters, whether they preferred Fox or Cárdenas, got at least part of what they voted for: an end to the state-party system. In the aftermath, the PRI old guard, the "dinosaurs," railed against the "technocrats" headed by Zedillo, who, pursuing a legacy as a democrat, had kept his word by guaranteeing that the electoral authorities for the first time were completely independent. About the only thing the PRI factions seemed to agree on was that shredding begin immediately. Many Mexican analysts believed a fracture was inevitable, with possibly some of the technocrats realigning behind Fox, whose party failed to gain a majority in Congress, and the dinosaurs aiming to make his life miserable.

There was also much finger-pointing and consternation within the PRD. The party did retain the mayoralty of Mexico City, though barely, but morale remained low and direction unsure. Cárdenas went back and forth on whether to accept Fox's invitation to the PRD to cooperate with his government, and observers wondered whether the party might eventually turn to a younger standard-bearer.

Fox, who was not due to take office until December 1, continued to promise everything to everyone. Wall Street didn't mind his vow to establish an anticorruption commission, but was concerned by his commitment "to reduce the gap in income distribution," with David Malpass, chief international economist at Bear, Stearns & Co. huffing in the *Wall Street Journal*, "This sounds like code language for anti-growth tax-rate increases." Other financial analysts were not as exercised, noting that when Fox was the governor of the state of Guanajuato, the economy there grew steadily in a capital-friendly environment of low wages and social-spending cuts. The result was that, as in most of Mexico, as in Britain under Blair for that matter, the gap between rich and poor widened.

Ordinary citizens, meanwhile, hoped the election would somehow lead to a Mexico more livable and respectful of human rights. Many wondered, too, whether the ouster of the PRI finally would mean an end to the six-year cycle of economic disasters known as "the sexenio curse." In the last quarter-century, nearly every presidential transition has been accompanied by an economic disaster, such as the currency crashing in 1994. In 2000 there seemed to be a consensus in the international financial community that the Mexican economy was sound. But few concerns were voiced in 1994 either, and Mexicans, rightly ever skeptical, will tell you that when it comes to crises in their country, nothing ever happens—until it happens. ●

DOUGLAS W. PAYNE is a New York-based writer.

Say it ain't so, Karl

"The plethora of literary and political journals that once made New York so lively—*Partisan Review, Commentary, Dissent, Esquire*—have either run out of energy or turned their pages over to photo spreads of half-naked models."

From an anti-New York column by Franklin Foer in the *New Republic*, June 19, 2000

Get ready for next summer's swimsuit issue featuring socialist academics. —EDS.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Belgrade: Youth and Resistance

Kira Brunner

AT THE RISK of being called a spy, or worse, a journalist, I set out, entry visa in hand, to cross the Serbian border. As I traveled by car service to the border, my companions consisted of another American, a fast-talking Serb who had lived out the war in Connecticut, and a terrified old Serb woman, who was sure the two Americans in the back seat were here either to send coded messages to the Pentagon ordering another round of bombing or to steal her jewelry. Which was worse she was not entirely certain.

My true mission was less covert than my fellow travelers imagined. My hope was to meet and talk with people in Serbia, in order to learn about grassroots opposition to Slobodan Milosevic. This is not what I told the heavily armed border guard when he threatened to turn "the two American journalists" back. Our quick-thinking new friend from Connecticut smilingly told the guard that the Americans were here to tour the majestic Serbian monasteries, of which they had heard so much. "Yes, yes," we chimed in, "we are very interested in studying the church." The guard let us pass without even glancing into our bags. Once in Serbia, the young man turned around and looked us in the eye: "All right, I helped get you in, I know you journalists, now promise you won't write anything bad about my country."

Belgrade gives all the appearance of a lively city. People crowd the streets selling black market goods off the hoods of their cars and stay out drinking in open air cafés late into the night. Yet if you ask them, they will tell you that the city is not what it once was—an international capital filled with smiling tourists who came to admire and spend freely. Still, it is deeply alive even as it struggles under the economic weight of sanctions and the psychological weight of last year's bombing by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Thriving on the energy of the city, a new movement called Otpor has launched a formidable campaign against the Milosevic regime.

My first introduction to Otpor was through Branko Ilic, one of its founding members. Before going to Belgrade, I met Branko on the island of Broc at a small nongovernmental organization (NGO) conference. Even with the enticing blue waters and dramatic, rocky hills, he was uncomfortable lying on the beach and spoke constantly about returning to Serbia where he could get back to work. Work consists of organizing demonstrations, street actions, endless strategy meetings, and petitioning the opposition parties for support. At the beach he wore a black T-shirt with the slogan in Cyrillic: "Otpor will live." In Serbia, wearing such a shirt would have meant his immediate arrest.

Branko and I arranged to meet again in Belgrade. He gave me two cell phone numbers, an e-mail address, and a business card sporting a pop art graphic of the Otpor symbol, a raised, clenched fist. Otpor literally translated means resistance; and Branko Ilic is a typical member—an odd combination of businessman, techno-punk, and a walking, talking incarnation of a World War II Hollywood hero of the French Resistance.

For years the older opposition parties, the women's movement, and NGOs have fought against the regime. Otpor has now surfaced as the first youth resistance movement. It hopes to include, and embrace, people of all ages and political backgrounds. It began with students and young people but has gradually attracted the attention of older pensioners, workers, lawyers, politicians, and even the clergy. For older activists, Otpor offers a glimpse of hope. Sonja Licht, currently working at the George Soros Open Society Institute, says "Otpor is so im-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

portant just because somehow it came together. Somehow it happened, against all odds and expectations." It is not surprising that the momentum for such a movement began with the young. As Licht notes, "The very fact that someone, and it could only be young people, has the strength and the courage to create such a movement in itself is a miracle."

Once in Belgrade, I track Branko down and we arrange to meet the next afternoon at a downtown café. I arrive early and sit right below the window of the Otpor offices. The cafe is swarming with young activists. They fill up the five tables to my left, where they drink coffee, argue politics, and flirt with one another. Children as young as ten and eleven arrive on roller blades, the boys in Michael Jordan T-shirts, the girls in miniskirts. They clamber up the steps to the offices above, then file down again, their backpacks stuffed with posters and stickers.

Branko arrives, clicks off his cell phone, and introduces Marko Djursic, a serious, seventeen-year-old pimply-faced boy who speaks calmly and directly. Marko and Branko describe how Otpor made its first public appearance in November 1999, when it joined a five-month student protest at the Faculty of Philology at Belgrade University. The protest was directed against a new Law on Universities, adopted on May 26, 1998, which granted government authorities the power to appoint rectors and faculty deans. The students opposed the appointment of Radmilo Marojevic, a member of an ultranationalist party and the force behind the dismissal of many professors. Amazingly, the demonstrations were a success. The dean was dismissed, and, as Branko describes it, "the first victory of Otpor," was celebrated. He views this as a sign for the future. If students could intimidate a dean, he reasons, why can't they do much more? "We are now trying to say to the Serbian public that there is another dean of this country and his name is Slobodan Milosevic . . . and the Serbian people can be successful in dismissing [him]."

As we sit and drink coffee, Branko and Marko talk about the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, called for September. Otpor proposes that the opposition run a unified campaign against the regime. They want voters to vote for or against Milosevic. This, they argue, is the only way to increase the slim chances of actually overturning him. But this strategy is complicated by the threat of a Serbian coup in Montenegro. The Montenegrin president, Milo Djukanovic, and Vuk Draskovi, the leader of the Renewal Movement, the largest opposition party in Serbia, are both calling for a boycott of the election.

BRANKO SMILES and says that if the elections do not unfold as planned, not to worry, "There is a war plan." They will begin a campaign for civil disobedience. "We will organize something like chaos here in Belgrade," some kind of general strike that they hope will close down "public transport, cinemas, theaters. Then citizens will stop paying taxes and phone and electricity bills." It is a stunning image but more ambitious than it is practical. Even if Otpor shut down schools and inspired workers to walk out of the factories—actions that in the United States would be the equivalent of shutting down the state—it would have little impact in Serbia. Factories already rot unattended; much of the economy is firmly fixed in that mysterious gray zone; sanctions make empty shelves an everyday occurrence; and so many bills are misdirected or left unpaid that only the most aggressive campaign would be felt at all by the regime. Speaking on this subject at a local trade union meeting, professor of philosophy Zagorka Pesic-Golubovic pointed out that half the workers are either unemployed or laid off. "If the workers are not in the factories there can be no general strike."

After a few hours of talking, we go upstairs to look at the offices. There are three whitewashed rooms; in the largest, a meeting is just getting underway; the smallest is devoted to media and information. On the wall, that day's arrests are posted on a large sheet of butcher paper. Each morning the filled sheet is replaced by a fresh one. Arrests of Otpor members are carefully tracked. As soon as they are phoned in, whoever is staffing the press desk immediately sets to work getting the word out, phoning each number on a list of media contacts. It is 4:40 p.m. and already three names have been written in red marker on the wall. Branko returns from the meeting room, clicks off one of his cell phones, and sits down. His face is white,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but he smiles, attempting to look unconcerned as he shakes his head in disbelief. Marko walks in after him, looking serious. "They arrested Branko's father. He was held for two and a half hours then released." Still smiling, Branko shrugs, stands up, sits down, paces the room, then frantically begins making more calls. Two and a half hours is about the amount of time we sat downstairs drinking coffee and talking about the elections. The young man at the press desk walks over to the paper on the wall and under the three other names adds Branko's father's name, the date, and time.

Looking at Branko, I remember him back in Croatia lying uneasily on the beach. He told me then he was just too busy to be afraid. Marko, on the other hand, hints at his own fear about what might happen if they do not win against the man who "has produced wars in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, with hundreds of thousands of deaths. Why wouldn't he kill thirty thousand Serbian youths? I think he is capable of doing that. I think he really is."

In recent months, Otpor has recorded more than ten thousand arrests of its members. A new Law on Terrorism has been drafted that will allow the state to treat political dissidents with an extraordinarily severe hand. Already hints of what such a law might mean are being felt. Branko, for instance, was recently accused of bombing a café in his home village. Although the bombing has all the signs of a mafia attack, Branko is a far more attractive target for the regime. Now, a standing warrant has been issued for his arrest. If he is found within the perimeters of his village, police are to arrest him immediately and try him for terrorism.

ARE YOU MOVING?

•

Please notify us one month in advance of your change of address. Send both old and new addresses to:

•

DISSENT
Subscription Services Department
P.O. Box 3000
Denville, NJ 07834-3000

THE STATE has gone to great lengths to portray Otpor members as violent hooligans. Every evening, news programs broadcast clips of Otpor rallies interspliced with shots of dead bodies from the Kosovo war, the American flag flapping atop the White House, and Croatian nationalists clinging to the turrets of tanks. Posters in the street portray Otpor members in Nazi uniform, fists clenched and raised in a Heil Hitler-like salute. Beneath the image it reads: "Madeleine's Youth. Killing Children, Destroying Schools, Destroying Hospitals, Destroying Bridges, Destroying Monasteries. Why?" The Serbian propaganda department spends considerable energy depicting Otpor as the four-headed monster of Hitler, Croatia, NATO, and the United States. Otpor in fact is committed to nonviolent action, though if you read *Politica*, or watch Serbian television you would never know this. There, laughs Branko, "we are terrorists, we are mercenaries, we are traitors, fascists, we are everything bad in this world."

In the past two years, the authorities have arrested Branko three times. His most recent arrest came when he was caught spray painting "Resistance to Milosevic" on a garage wall close to the Otpor headquarters in central Belgrade. After throwing away his paint cans, police beat him on the street, then tossed him into the back of their car. On the way to the police station, an officer who had just beaten him turned around and apologized. "Please excuse me," he said to Branko, shaking his head, "I am also dissatisfied with the regime." As Branko tells me the story he fidgets and abruptly changes the subject, launching into a discussion of Otpor's new slogan, "The People is Otpor." All the people?, I wonder. Even an officer who arrested and beat you?

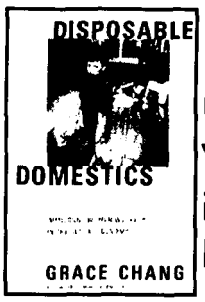
Otpor's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness—its ability to harness the dissatisfaction of people from all walks of life. It is no longer simply us against them, now it seems some of them may be us. Otpor allows anyone fed up with the regime to join its ranks. As a result, Branko and his friends find themselves with such strange bedfellows as nationalist Dobrica Cosic, members of the Orthodox Church, and ordinary citizens who are disgusted with Milosevic not for his murderous

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

policies but for losing Kosovo. How to balance a democratic policy of open recruitment—which may well be the only way to gain the kind of serious support Otpor needs—with a more ethically pure stance is undoubtedly the most difficult question Otpor now faces. How to negotiate the sticky alliance between a police officer and his captive?

But this is a dilemma overshadowed by the more immediate problem of how to topple the Milosevic regime. As Branko explains, "We have different opinions, people from different nationalities, different political parties, different views: from student organizations, from the right, from the left, from the center . . . we are all united with this idea of getting Milosevic out of power and transforming Serbia." These words are now the stock answer given by most Otpor members when asked about some of their more nationalist members. Otpor is concerned only with overthrowing Milosevic. What happens after that now seems impossible to imagine. Again and again, Otpor activists tell me, "We are against Milosevic, that is enough for now." And they do have a point. Bickering among themselves or fantasizing about the future will not help them achieve their most urgent goal. Yet their expediency raises hard questions that one day must be faced. What they will do if they are successful in toppling the government is entirely unclear. They have no program that they plan to implement after the fall of Milosevic. They have no leaders they hope to see take his place. But what they do have is determination to resist the regime. And for now that may be enough. ●

KIRA BRUNNER is an assistant editor at *Dissent*. Material for this article was gathered with Laura Secor.



DISPOSABLE DOMESTICS
Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy
By Grace Chang

In a nation with an unprecedented history of immigration, the prevailing image of those who cross our borders in search of equal opportunity is that of a drain on society. Chang proves that the women who perform the least desirable jobs are crucial to our economy and society. "An enormous contribution." —Saskia Sassen

ISBN 0-89608-617-8
$18

HOW CAPITALISM UNDERDEVELOPED BLACK AMERICA
Updated Edition
Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society
By Manning Marable
Volume 4
South End Press Classics Series

"Following in the footsteps of W.E.B. DuBois, Oliver C. Cox, and Walter Rodney, Manning Marable's *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* is a ground-breaking study of the political economy of Black America." —*The Black Scholar*

ISBN 0-89608-579-1
$22

South End Press
www.southendpress.org
To order by credit card, call 800.533.8478.
For desk, exam, and review copies, please fax 617.547.1333.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OUR REPORTING IS NEVER KNEE-JERK.

(IT'S MORE LIKE A SWIFT KICK IN THE GROIN.)

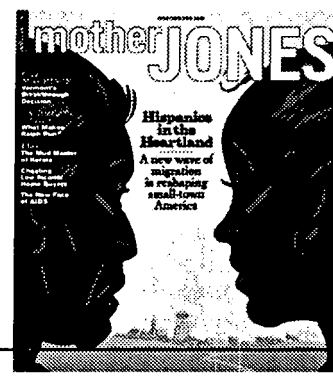
MOTHER JONES

THE REST IS JUST MASS MEDIA

Here at *Mother Jones* we've earned a reputation for hard-hitting investigative journalism that makes you think. And makes you laugh. Because if we're going to hit you where you live, we'd better maintain a healthy sense of humor. Now you can introduce yourself to *Mother Jones* for the crazy rate of just $10 per year - six chunky, feisty, hard-to-put-down issues for less than the price of a pizza. What are you waiting for? It's risk free: money back if you're not satisfied. **www.motherjones.com**

SUBSCRIBE TO A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW. CALL 1-800-GET-MOJO.

Canada & Foreign. $28 Prepaid in US Funds to Mother Jones, PO Box 334, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0334. Please refer to promotion code AP9803



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Moral Demands of Global Justice

Thomas W. Pogge

RETROSPECTIVES on the twentieth century give ample space to its horrors. Natural catastrophes are overshadowed by wars and other human-made disasters: six million murdered in the German Holocaust, thirty million starved to death in Mao's Great Leap Forward, eleven million wiped out by Josef Stalin, two million killed by the Khmer Rouge, half a million hacked to death in Rwanda, and so on. Missing from these retrospectives are the deaths from starvation and preventable diseases—world hunger for short—some two hundred million in just the few years since the end of the cold war. Why are these deaths not mentioned? Are they too humdrum, too ordinary, not shocking enough? Or are they perhaps *too* disturbing—deaths that, unlike the others, are *not* clearly someone else's responsibility?

Let us consider the disturbing thought. Do we bear some responsibility for deaths due to extreme poverty abroad? Confronted with this question, most respond with a firm *No*. But this *No* comes very quickly and with a reluctance to delve more deeply into the reasons for it. This reluctance is shared by ethicists, whose job it is to think about moral issues and responsibilities. Most of them probably agree with the *No* of their compatriots, but very few have taken the trouble to examine the question carefully enough to provide good reasons for this answer.

How does one examine such a question? One may begin by recapitulating the basic facts about world hunger. Of a total of six billion human beings, one quarter live below the international poverty line (*WDR*, 25), "that income or expenditure level below which a minimum, nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are not affordable" (*HDR* 1996, 222). This level is specified in terms of a daily income with the purchasing power that one dollar had in the United States in 1985. Because of inflation in the intervening years, this level now corresponds to an annual *per capita* income of $560 at purchasing power parity or to an annual *per capita* income of $140 at current exchange rates. This last figure takes account of the fact that, in the poor countries, only about twenty-five cents is needed, on average, to buy local currency that has as much purchasing power as one dollar has in the United States (*cf. WDR*, 230-1). So households in the poorest quartile of humankind cannot afford, per person per year, whatever basic necessities can be bought for $560 in the United States or for $140 in the average poor country. (As this article goes to press, I find that the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program have quietly redefined the international poverty line in terms of a daily income with the purchasing power that one dollar had in the United States in 1993 [*HDR 2000*, 4, 170f.]. Since the U.S. dollar lost more than a quarter of its value between 1985 and 1993, this revision lowers the international poverty line by over 25 percent and thus conveniently reduces the number of global poor without cost to anyone.)

Such severe poverty has consequences: "Worldwide, 34,000 children under age five die daily from hunger and preventable diseases" (*USA*, iii). Roughly one third of all human deaths, some fifty thousand daily or eighteen million annually, are due to poverty-related causes (*WHO*, Table 2). This fraction is so high because far more than a quarter of all human deaths, and births, occur in the poorest quartile due to the much shorter life expectancy among the poor. "Two out of five children in the developing world are stunted, one in three is underweight and one in ten is wasted" (*FAO*).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One quarter of all children between five and fourteen, 250 million in all, are compelled to work, often under harsh conditions, as soldiers, prostitutes, or domestic servants or in agriculture, construction, textile, or carpet production (ILO; *WDR*, 62). If they survive long enough, many of them will join the currently 850 million illiterate adults. Some 840 million persons are today chronically malnourished, 880 million without access to health services, one billion without adequate shelter, 1.3 billion without access to safe drinking water, two billion without electricity, and 2.6 billion without access to basic sanitation (*HDR* 1998, 49; *HDR* 1999, 22).

MANY PEOPLE in the more affluent countries believe that severe global poverty is rapidly declining. With so much economic and technological progress, it seems reasonable to assume that a rising tide must be lifting all boats. International declarations, summits, and conventions devoted to the problem project a strong image of concerted action and brisk progress. But the real trend is more mixed. There has been significant progress in the formulation and ratification of relevant documents, in the gathering and publication of statistical information, and even in reducing important aspects of poverty. And yet, in the period since the end of the cold war, the number of persons subsisting below the international poverty line "rose from 1.2 billion in 1987 to 1.5 billion today and, if recent trends persist, will reach 1.9 billion by 2015" (*WDR*, 25).

The trend in international inequality clearly shows the inadequacy of the rising-tide image: "The income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 74 to 1 in 1997, up from 60 to 1 in 1990 and 30 to 1 in 1960." Estimates for earlier times are eleven to one for 1913, seven to one for 1870, and three to one for 1820 (*HDR* 1999, 3). Today, while the bottom quartile of humankind live on less than $140 per year, 1998 *per capita* gross national product (GNP) was $29,340 in the United States; somewhat more in Japan; and somewhat less, on average, in Western Europe (*WDR*, 230-1).

Such enormous inequality casts doubt upon the common view that eradicating world hunger would be prohibitively expensive, that it would truly impoverish us and destroy our culture and lifestyle. Richard Rorty articulates such a view when he expresses doubt that we can help the global poor: "a politically feasible project of egalitarian redistribution of wealth requires there to be enough money around to ensure that, after the redistribution, the rich will still be able to recognize themselves—will still think their lives worth living" (Rorty, 14). Such apprehension may seem justified in view of the huge number of poor people, 1.5 billion below the international poverty line. But it is in fact grossly exaggerated because global income inequality is much larger than Rorty seems to realize. The aggregate income of the poorest quartile is less than 0.7 percent of the global social product, less than $210 billion out of nearly $30 trillion (*WDR*, 231). A shift in global income distribution that would double (or triple) their incomes entirely at our expense would still be quite minor. It would reduce the top tenth of incomes by a mere 1 or 2 percent—hardly a serious threat to our culture and lifestyle.

This conclusion is reinforced by looking at inequalities in wealth. These are considerably greater than inequalities in income, since well-off households typically have more net worth than annual income while poor households typically have less. The fortunes of the ultrarich, in particular, have become enormous: "The world's 200 richest people more than doubled their net worth in the four years to 1998, to more than $1 trillion. The assets of the top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and their 600 million people" (*HDR* 1999, 3). "The additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all and safe water and sanitation for all is ... less than 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world" (HDR 1998, 30). Once again, Rorty's apprehension looks vastly overblown.

A third way of putting the cost of eradicating world hunger in perspective relates this cost to the so-called peace dividend. Following the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

end of the cold war, military expenditures declined from 4.7 percent of the global social product in 1985 to 2.9 percent in 1996 (*HDR* 1998, 197; *HDR* 1999, 191). This decline currently produces an annual dividend of more than $500 billion annually—far more than the under $210 billion collective annual income of the poorest quartile.

Many U.S. citizens apparently believe that a large proportion of the federal budget is already being spent on foreign aid. But in fact, "The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) administers America's foreign assistance programs, which account for less than one-half of 1% of the federal budget" (USAID). Net official development assistance (ODA) provided by the United States has fallen to under $9 billion in 1998, $32 per citizen. As a share of GNP, this is 0.10 percent (versus 0.21 percent under Ronald Reagan in 1987-1988)—the lowest among developed countries, which have followed the U.S. lead by reducing their aggregate net ODA from 0.33 percent of their combined GNPs to 0.24 percent ($51.9 billion) during the same period (*HDR* 2000, 218). The allocation of such funds is, moreover, governed by political considerations: only 21 percent goes to the forty-three least developed countries (*HDR* 2000, 218) and only 8.3 percent is spent on meeting basic needs (*HDR* 2000, 79). Thus the twenty-one donor states together spend $4.3 billion annually on meeting basic needs abroad, less than .08 cents per day for each person in the poorest quartile.

The World Food Summit in Rome, organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in November 1996, provides a telling example of prevailing official attitudes toward poverty eradication. Its principal achievement was this pledge by the 186 participating governments: "We, the Heads of State and Government, or our representatives, gathered at the World Food Summit . . . reaffirm the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger. We pledge our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an on-going effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate [!] view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015. We consider it intolerable that more than 800 million people throughout the world, and particularly in developing countries, do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. This situation is unacceptable." (Rome)

The U.S. government published its own interpretation of this pledge: "the attainment of any 'right to adequate food' or 'fundamental right to be free from hunger' is a goal or aspiration to be realized progressively that does not give rise to any international obligations" (IS). It also challenged the FAO's claim (*WA*) that fulfilling the pledge would require all developed states combined to increase their development assistance in agriculture by $6 billion annually: "As part of the *U.S. Action Plan on Food Security*, USAID commissioned a separate study of the projected cost of meeting the World Food Summit target and a strategy for reaching this goal. The study, completed in mid-1998, estimated that the target could be reached with additional global assistance of [only] $2.6 billion annually." (*USA*, Appendix A). So the study proposes that the pledge be backed by only $3 rather than $7 annually for each malnourished person. The hunger reduction plan adopted in Rome implicitly envisions well over 200 million deaths from hunger and preventable diseases over the 1997-2015 plan period. One might have thought that, even if the FAO's proposed annual increase of $6 billion were to reduce hunger faster than planned, this should be no cause for regret. Halving world hunger in nineteen years, after all, is glacial progress. And $6 billion is not much to ask from the high-income countries, whose combined annual GNP in 1998 was $22,599 billion (*WDR* 231).

THE GROWING reluctance to spend money on reducing world hunger is associated with the increasingly popular idea that this goal is best achieved through investment rather than aid. Hunger will be erased through globalization and free markets. But this idea is problematic. The freer, globalized markets of recent years have actually, thanks partly to the 1997-1998 global debt and currency crisis, produced a 25 percent *increase* in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

number of people living below the international poverty line (*cf. WDR,* 25). Foreign investment and free markets can be helpful where a minimally adequate infrastructure is in place and the physical and mental development of prospective employees has not been permanently retarded through disease, malnutrition, and illiteracy. But foreign investment will rarely create such conditions; it will not help those children who *now* need food, safe water, basic sanitation, basic health services, and primary education. Money spent to meet these needs would produce an advance that would help attract foreign investment, which could then sustain the advance on its own. If these needs are not met, investment will flow elsewhere, and the enormous gap between rich and poor will continue to grow.

This response—that children must have their basic needs met—is one we would give unquestioningly in a domestic context. We would find it intolerable if, somewhere in the United States, infant mortality were 20 percent because of lack of food, safe water, basic sanitation, basic health services, and primary education. Why are similar conditions abroad seen as so much more acceptable? Obviously, the national border around our country plays a significant role in our moral thinking. But what exactly is its supposed moral significance?

The common idea is that the United States is a solidaristic community whose members owe much more to one another than to outsiders. This idea can be relevantly extended in two ways. One could claim that our responsibilities toward foreigners are overridden by our responsibilities toward compatriots. But this claim would be ineffective, because the cost of erasing world hunger is too small to entail any real losses for our compatriots. One percent of the developed countries' GNP—less than half the "peace dividend"—could greatly reduce world hunger within a few years, allowing expenditures to decline significantly thereafter (*cf.* Pogge). This outlay would not prevent us from meeting our responsibilities toward our compatriots, however expansively these may be conceived.

ALTERNATIVELY, one could claim that we have no responsibilities to provide any aid and support beyond the solidaristic national community we sustain with one another. This claim might be backed by saying that the responsibilities we would otherwise have are, in this case, canceled by the fact that starving foreigners have states and compatriots of their own who ought to provide the needed support. But this argument is unpromising because the global poor do not in fact have states and compatriots willing and able to secure their basic needs and also have not agreed to waive whatever claims they would otherwise have on us. It is more promising to back the claim by saying that responsibilities to provide any aid and support, beyond one's immediate family and beyond emergencies one immediately encounters, arise only through voluntary participation in a solidaristic community. By living in the United States, we have accepted such responsibilities toward our compatriots; but we have not accepted any such responsibilities toward foreigners.

To examine this view, let us reflect on Brazil for a moment and assume that most Brazilians do not think of their country as a solidaristic community. There is in fact evidence for this assumption, as Brazil is the most unequal society on earth, with the highest fifth of incomes being thirty-two times the lowest fifth (this quintile ratio tends to be between four and ten for countries outside Latin America [*HDR* 1999, 146-9]). Global income inequality is only slightly greater than Brazil's when incomes are scored in terms of purchasing power (though it is vastly greater when we score incomes in terms of exchange rates, as we should to obtain a rough measure of the price of reducing poverty). The two cases are close in other respects as well: Brazil's *per capita* GNP is $4,570—versus the world's $4,890 (*WDR,* 230-1). In Brazil, 28.7 percent of the population lives below the international poverty line and 24 percent lack access to safe drinking water—versus 25 percent and 22 percent worldwide (*HDR* 1999, 146). In Brazil, 16 percent of all adults are illiterate—versus 22 percent worldwide; life expectancy in both cases is sixty-seven years (*HDR* 1999, 135, 137).

Now suppose the rich elite in Brazil maintain that they have no responsibilities with regard to the poor in their country because most Brazilians do not see themselves as members,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the poor, in one solidaristic community. Few Americans would, I think, accept this disclaimer. We are willing to respect other societies even if they do not realize, or even aspire to realize, full justice as we understand it. But we do believe that there are certain minimum conditions that any state—whether its people conceive it as a solidaristic community or not—must meet for it to deserve moral respect. However such a minimal standard of decency might be formulated in detail (*cf.* Rawls), it seems clear that Brazil, given its massive and avoidable poverty, would fail to qualify.

But if the global economic order is at least as bad as Brazil's, must not the same judgment apply to it as well? This thought is suggested by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized," including the "right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care" (articles 28 and 25). As article 28 suggests, the incidence of severe poverty is importantly influenced by the existing social and international order. And such poverty may then entail not merely positive responsibilities for influential Brazilians and for us as potential helpers, but also negative responsibilities for influential Brazilians and for us as supporters of an economic order that reproduces massive starvation and poverty. Instead of merely failing to help the poor, we may be involved in harming them through the imposition of a global economic order under which inequality increases so rapidly that the gains from economic progress are huge at the top and minuscule or nonexistent at the bottom of the global hierarchy (*cf.* Milanovic).

It is hardly surprising that the global order reflects the interests of wealthy and powerful states. Dependent on our votes and taxes, our government, with its allies, works very hard to shape the rules for our benefit, as we can see from its response to the World Food Summit, from its successful renegotiation of the Law of the Seas Treaty, and from countless other examples. To be sure, the global poor have their own governments. But almost all of them are too weak to exert any real influence on the organization of the global economy. More important, such governments have little incentive to attend to the needs of their poor citizens, as their continuation in power depends on the local elite and on foreign governments and corporations. It is not surprising, then, that developing countries with rich natural resource endowments are especially likely to experience civil wars and undemocratic rule and hence achieve slower (if any) economic growth (Lam). Their rulers can sell the country's resources, buy arms and soldiers to maintain their rule, and amass personal fortunes. They like the global economic order just the way it is. And affluent states, too, have no interest in changing the rules so that ownership rights in natural resources cannot be acquired from tyrannical governments. Such a change would reduce the supply and hence increase the price of the resources we import.

People can kill one another with bombs and machetes. But economic arrangements are often quite as effective. Millions were killed in the Irish potato famine, in Stalin's forced collectivization, in Mao's Great Leap Forward, in contemporary North Korea, as well as in many other human-made disasters. The ongoing catastrophe of world hunger is of the same kind. But it is also different: by being less confined in space and time, even more devastating, and less recognized. It claims a third of all human deaths. But these deaths happen far away, to people we never encounter. They happen in social contexts whose dependence on the existing global order we do not understand. And they happen in areas where we assume people have always been desperately poor. It seems unlikely, then, that the citizens and governments of the developed countries will be struck by the problem enough to recognize their responsibility. And so the deaths, with occasional summits, can be expected to continue for a long time to come.

IT IS OFTEN said that moral reflections on world hunger are worthless, because no one denies that hunger is bad and should not exist. We should instead think about the practical question: how hunger might best be erased. I certainly agree that we should think about this practical question and will speak to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it shortly. But I strongly disagree with the first point. The U.S. government has gone far out of its way to deny that the World Food Summit pledge, which calls hunger "intolerable" and "unacceptable," gives rise to any international obligations. This great moral error, shared by most governments and citizens of the developed countries, is the principal obstacle to eradicating world hunger. Without a sense of moral responsibility for the global economic order we are imposing, there will not be the political will to reform this order, nor sufficient readiness by governments and individuals to mitigate its worst effects.

The moral responsibility I assert presupposes that the governments and citizens of the developed countries *can* reduce world hunger through measures of reform and mitigation. Some professional economists invite skepticism about this assumption in three ways: by showing that some methods (for example, large-scale development aid) have not worked well; by arguing that the effects of individual variables in a highly complex system cannot be reliably measured (the clear benefits of Oxfam projects or Grameen Bank microlending to specific individuals may well be offset by their unknowable indirect effects); and by spirited disagreements about what is to be done (causing laypersons to shrug: "If even economists differ so sharply, then perhaps we had better do nothing").

But this skepticism is rejected even by the governments of the affluent states. They have made the World Food Summit pledge and, in the case of the United States, argued in great detail that they can halve hunger by 2015 even more cheaply than the FAO has estimated. Not even these governments—certainly not above characterizing things they don't want to do as things they cannot do—have endorsed the view that reducing world hunger is beyond our capacities. To be sure, they recognize no moral responsibility to reduce world hunger immediately and rapidly. But even they are constrained to agree that, if such a responsibility existed, it is not defeated by any evident incapacity to fulfill it.

It is true that much so-called aid has been ineffective in eradicating poverty. But this is hardly surprising, given that most of it has been bilateral development aid focused on buying political support from foreign governments and domestic exporters. Money can be more effectively spent, especially on local goods and services: enabling poor people to buy more and better foodstuffs and shelter, financing more and better schools and health services, and improving the local infrastructure (safe water, sanitation, electricity, road, rail links). Many governments of developing countries would welcome such funds and would contribute to making them effective, especially if their contribution were rewarded with continued funding. Yes, there are other poor countries whose rulers are more interested in keeping their poorer compatriots destitute, uneducated, impotent, dependent, and hence exploitable. In such cases, the least we should do is withdraw support from these rulers: by not letting them sell their country's resources to our firms, by not letting them borrow from our banks in their country's name, and by not letting them buy from our firms the arms they need to stay in power. Doing that would make it harder for them to maintain their power without popular support and, most important, would greatly reduce the rewards of, and hence incentives toward, the undemocratic acquisition and unresponsive exercise of political power.

A third response to the economists' smokescreen of skepticism goes back to Immanuel Kant, who argued that a morally mandated project may not be abandoned merely because, for all we currently know, it *may* be unachievable, but only if it is "demonstrably impossible" (Kant 89, 173-4). When the income of the top tenth of humankind is one hundred times the income of the bottom quarter, when a third of all human deaths are due to poverty, and when aggregate global income is continuously rising, it would be ludicrous to claim that reducing poverty is demonstrably impossible. We do not perhaps know the best way to proceed, but we are not exactly clueless either and would learn much more in the course of making a serious and concerted effort. Clearly, our critical deficiency is not expertise but a sense of moral responsibility and, based thereon, the political will to fund basic development and push reforms in the global economic order. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THOMAS W. POGGE teaches moral and political philosophy at Columbia University. His work on this essay was supported by a grant from the Global Security and Sustainability Program of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Sources Used in Order of First Appearance:

WDR—World Bank: *World Development Report 1999/2000* (Oxford University Press 1999), also available at http://www.worldbank.org/wdr/2000/fullreport.html.

HDR—United Nations Development Program: *Human Development Report* (Oxford University Press).

USA—U.S. Action Plan on Food Security (http://www.fas.usda.gov:80/icd/summit/usactplan.pdf; March 1999).

UNICEF: *The State of the World's Children 1998* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

http://www.thehungersite.com.

WHO: *The World Health Report 1999* (http://www.who.int/whr/1999).

FAO—UN Food and Agricultural Organization, at http://www.fao.org/focus/e/sofi/child-e.htm.

ILO—International Labor Organization at http://www.ilo.org/public/english/270asie/feature/child.htm.

Richard Rorty, "Who are We? Moral Universalism and Economic Triage," *Diogenes* 173 (1996).

USAID (http://www.info.usaid.gov/pubs/cp98/progprview.htm).

http://www.brown.edu/Departments/World_Hunger_Program/hungerweb/HN/Articles/WFS/EDIT2.html.

Rome Declaration on World Food Security (http://www.fao.org/wfs/policy/english/96-3eng.htm).

IS—"Interpretive Statement" filed by the U.S. Government in reference to the first paragraph of the Rome Declaration on World Food Security (http://www.fas.usda.gov:80/icd/summit/interpre.html).

WA—Nikos Alexandratos, ed.: *World Agriculture: Toward 2010, an FAO Study* (Chichester, UK: J. Wiley & Sons and Rome: FAO, 1995).

Thomas W. Pogge, "A Global Resources Dividend" in David A. Crocker and Toby Linden, eds.: *Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 501-536.

John Rawls, *A Law of Peoples* (Harvard University Press 1999).

Branko Milanovic, "True World Income Distribution, 1988 and 1993: First Calculation Based on Household Surveys Alone," World Bank, October 1999.

Ricky Lam and Leonard Wantchekon, "Dictatorships as a Political Dutch Disease," working paper, Yale University, January 19, 1999.

Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Sponsored by the Center for the Humanities with the generous support of Max Palevsky.

The Fifth Annual Irving Howe Memorial Lecture

FRANK KERMODE

Professor Emeritus of English Literature at Cambridge University

"SHAKESPEARE AND POLITICS"

Thursday, November 9, 2000
6 p.m.
Proshansky Auditorium,
CUNY Graduate Center, Fifth Avenue and 34th Street

Free and Open to the Public

Also, hear Pulitzer Prize winning poet Galway Kinnell's "The Music of Poetry" on Monday, October 30, 6pm, Room 9204.

For more information call 212-817-2005.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Governing the Globe

What Is the Best We Can Do?

Michael Walzer

IMAGINE THE possible political arrangements of international society as if they were laid out along a continuum marked off according to the degree of centralization. Obviously, there are alternative markings; the recognition and enforcement of human rights could also be measured along a continuum, as could democratization, welfare provision, pluralism, and so on. But focusing on centralization is the quickest way to reach the key political and moral questions, above all the classical question: what is the best or the best possible regime? What constitutional goals should we set ourselves in an age of globalization?

My plan is to present seven possible regimes or constitutions or political arrangements. I will do this discursively, without providing a list in advance, but I do want to list the criteria against which the seven arrangements have to be evaluated: these are their capacity to promote peace, distributive justice, cultural pluralism, and individual freedom. Within the scope of this essay, I will have to deal summarily with some of the arrangements and some of the criteria. Because the criteria turn out to be inconsistent with—or at least in tension with—one another, my argument will be complicated, but it could be, and no doubt should be, much more so.

It's best to begin with the two ends of the continuum, so that its dimensions are immediately visible. On one side, let's say the left side (though I will raise some doubts about that designation later on), there is a unified global state, something like Immanuel Kant's "world republic," with a single set of citizens, identical with the set of adult human beings, all of them possessed of the same rights and obligations. This is the form that maximum centralization would take: each individual, every person in the world, would be connected directly to the center. A global empire, in which one nation ruled over all the others, would also operate from a single center, but insofar as its rulers differentiated between the dominant nation and all the others, and perhaps among the others too, this would represent a qualification on its centralized character. The centralization of the global state, by contrast, is unqualified. Following Thomas Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan*, I want to say that such a state could be a monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy; its unity is not affected by its political character. By contrast, unity is certainly affected by any racial, religious, or ethnic divisions, whether these are hierarchical in nature, as in the imperial case, establishing significant inequalities among the groups, or merely functional or regional. Any political realization of difference moves us rightward on the continuum as I am imagining it.

At the far right is the regime or the absence-of-regime that political theorists call "international anarchy." This phrase describes what is in fact a highly organized world, but one that is radically decentered. The organizations are individual sovereign states, and there is no effective law binding on all of them. There is no global authority or procedure for policy determination and no encompassing legal jurisdiction for either sovereigns or citizens. More than this (since I mean to describe an extreme condition), there are no smaller groups of states that have accepted a common law and submitted to its enforcement by international agencies; there are no stable organizations of states working to generate common policies with regard, say, to environmental questions, arms control, labor standards, the movement of capital, or any other issue of general concern. Sovereign states negotiate with each other on the basis of their "national interests," reach agreements, and sign treaties, but the treaties are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not enforceable by any third party. State leaders watch each other nervously and respond to each other's policies, but in every other sense, the centers of political decision making are independent; every state acts alone. This is not an account of our own situation; I am not describing the world as it is in 2000. But we are obviously closer to the right than to the left side of the continuum.

The strategy of this essay will be to move in from the two sides. I will be moving toward the center, but from opposite directions, so as to make clear that I am not describing a developmental or progressive history. The different regimes or arrangements are ideal types, not historical examples. And I don't assume in advance that the best regime lies at the center, only that it doesn't lie at the extremes. Even that assumption needs to be justified; so I had better turn immediately to the twin questions: What's wrong with radical centralization? What's wrong with anarchy? The second of these is the easier, because it is closer to our own experience. Anarchy leads regularly to war—and war to conquest, conquest to empire, empire to oppression, oppression to rebellion and secession, and secession leads back to anarchy and war again. The viciousness of the circle is continually reinforced by inequalities of wealth and power among the involved states and by the shifting character of these inequalities (which depend on trade patterns, technological development, military alliances, and so on). All this makes for insecurity and fear not only among the rulers of states but also among their ordinary inhabitants, and insecurity and fear are, as Hobbes argued, the chief cause of war.

But would an international society, however anarchic, all of whose constituent states were republics, be drawn into the same circle? Kant argued that republican citizens would be far less willing to accept the risks of war than kings were to impose those risks on their subjects—and so would be less threatening to their neighbors (*Perpetual Peace*, First Definitive Article). We certainly see evidence of that unwillingness in contemporary democracies, though it has not always been as strong as it is today. At the same time, it is qualified today by the willing use of the most advanced military technologies—which don't, indeed, put their users at risk though they impose very high costs on their targets. So it may be the case, as the Kosovo war suggests, that modern democracies won't live up to Kant's pacific expectations: they will fight, only not on the ground.

A rather different argument has been made by some contemporary political scientists: at least in modern times, democratic republics don't fight *with one another*. But if this is so, it is in part because they have had common enemies and have established multilateral forms of cooperation and coordination, alliances for mutual security, that mitigate the anarchy of their relations. They have moved, so to speak, to the left along the continuum.

But I don't want to dismiss international anarchy without saying something about its advantages. Despite the hazards of inequality and war, sovereign statehood is a way of protecting distinct historical cultures, sometimes national, sometimes ethnic/religious in character. The passion with which stateless nations pursue statehood and the driven character of national liberation movements reflect the somber realities of the twentieth century, from which it is necessary to draw moral and political conclusions for the twenty-first. Sovereign power is a means of self-protection, and it is very dangerous to be deprived of this means. So, the *morally* maximal form of decentralization would be a global society in which every national or ethnic/religious group that needed protection actually possessed sovereign power. But for reasons we all know, which have to do with the necessary territorial extension of sovereignty, the mix of populations on the ground, and the uneven distribution of natural resources above and below the ground, dividing up the world in this way would be (has been) a bloody business. And once the wars start, the divisions that result are unlikely to be either just or stable.

THE PROBLEMS at the other end of the continuum are of a different kind. Conventional warfare would be impossible in a radically centralized global state, for its agents would have disappeared, and none of the motives for going to war would any longer operate: ethnic and religious differences and divergent national interests, indeed, every kind of sectional interest, would lose their political

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

relevance. Diversity would be radically privatized. In principle, at least, the global state would be constituted solely and entirely by autonomous individuals, free, within the limits of the criminal law, to choose their own life plans.

In practice, however, this constituting principle is radically unlikely to prevail, and ideal types should not be fictional types; they have to fit an imaginable reality. It isn't plausible that the citizens of a global state would be, except for the free choices they make, exactly like one another, all the collective and inherited differences that make for rivalry and distrust today having disappeared in the course of the state's formation. Surely different understandings of how we ought to live would persist; and these would continue to be embodied in ways of life, historical cultures, and religions, commanding strong loyalties and seeking public expression. So let me redescribe the global state. Groups of many different sorts would continue to shape the lives of their members in significant ways, but their existence would be largely ignored by the central authorities; particularistic interests would be overridden; demands for the public expression of cultural divergence would be rejected.

The reason for the rejection is easily explained: the global state would be much like states today, only on a vastly greater scale. If it were to sustain itself over time, it too would have to command the loyalty of its citizens and give expression to a political culture distinctly its own. It would have to look legitimate to everyone in the world. Given this necessity, I don't see how it could accommodate anything like the range of cultural and religious difference that we see around us today. Even a global state committed to toleration would be limited in its powers of accommodation by its prior commitment to what I will call "globalism," that is, centralized rule over the whole world. For some cultures and most orthodox religions can only survive if they are permitted degrees of separation that are incompatible with globalism. And so the survival of these groups would be at risk; under the rules of the global state, they would not be able to sustain and pass on their way of life. This is the meaning I would give to Kant's warning that a cosmopolitan constitution could lead to "terrifying despotism" (*Theory and Practice*, Part III)—the danger is less to individuals than to groups. A more genuine regime of global toleration would have to make room for cultural and religious autonomy, but that would involve a move rightward on the continuum.

Once again, however, I want to acknowledge the advantages that lie on the continuum's far left side, though in this case they are more hypothetical than actual, since we have less experience of centralization than of anarchy. But we can generalize from the history of centralized states and suggest that global distributive justice might be better served by a strong government able to establish universal standards of labor and welfare and to shift resources from richer to poorer countries. Of course, the will to undertake egalitarian reforms might well be absent in the world republic—just as it is in most sovereign states today. But at least the capacity would exist; the European Community (EC) provides some modest but not insignificant examples of the redistribution that centralized power makes possible. At the same time, however, the strength of the single center carries with it the threat of tyranny.

Now let's move one step in from the left side of the continuum, which brings us to a global regime that has the form of a *Pax Romana*. It is centralized through the hegemony of a single great power over all the lesser powers of international society. This hegemony sustains world peace, even if there are intermittent rebellions, and it does this while still permitting some degree of cultural independence—perhaps in a form like that of the Ottoman *millet* system, under which different religious groups were granted partial legal autonomy. The autonomy is not secure, because the center is always capable of canceling it; nor will it necessarily take the form most desired by a particular group. It isn't negotiated between equals but granted by the powerful to the weak. Nonetheless, arrangements of this sort represent the most stable regime of toleration known in world history. The rulers of the empire recognize the value (at least, the prudential value) of group autonomy, and this recognition has worked very effectively for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

group survival. But the rulers obviously don't recognize individual citizens as participants in the government of the empire, they don't protect individuals against their own groups, and they don't aim at an equitable distribution of resources among either groups or individuals. Imperial hegemony is a form of political inequality that commonly makes for further inequalities in the economy and in social life generally.

I have to be careful in writing about imperial rule, because I am a citizen of the only state in the contemporary world capable of aspiring to it. That's not my own aspiration for my country, nor do I really think that it's possible, but I won't pretend to believe that a *Pax Americana*, however undesirable, is the worst thing that could happen to the world today (it may be the worst thing that could happen to America), and I have been an advocate of a more activist American political/military role in places like Rwanda and Kosovo. But a role of that sort is still far from imperial hegemony, which, though we might value it for the peace it brought (or just for an end to the massacres), is clearly not one of the preferred regimes. It would reduce some of the risks of a global state, but not in a stable way, because imperial power is often arbitrary and capricious. And even if a particular empire did protect communal autonomy, it would be of no use to individuals trapped in oppressive communities.

Now let's move in from the right side of the continuum: one step from anarchy brings us to something like the current arrangement of international society (hence this is the least idealized of my ideal types). We see in the world today a series of global organizations of a political, economic, and judicial sort—the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO),the World Court, and so on—that serve to modify state sovereignty. No state possesses the absolute sovereignty described by early modern political theorists, which makes for anarchy in its strongest sense. On the other hand, the global organizations are weak; their decision mechanisms are uncertain and slow; their powers of enforcement are difficult to bring to bear and, at best, only partially effective. Warfare between or among states has been reduced, but overall violence has not been reduced. There are many weak, divided, and unstable states in the world today, and the global regime has not been successful in preventing civil wars, military interventions, savage repression of political enemies, massacres, and "ethnic cleansing" aimed at minority populations. Nor has global inequality been reduced, even though the flow of capital across borders (labor mobility too, I think) is easier than it has ever been—and, according to theorists of the free market, this ought to have egalitarian effects. All in all, we cannot be happy with the current state of the world; indeed, the combination of (many) weak states with weak global organizations brings disadvantages from both directions: the protection of ethnic and religious difference is inadequate and so is the protection of individual rights and the promotion of equality.

So we need to move further toward centralization. The next step doesn't bring us to, say, a United Nations with its own army and police force or a World Bank with a single currency. In terms of intellectual strategy, we would do better to reach arrangements of that kind from the other side. Consider instead the same "constitutional" arrangements that we currently have, reinforced by a much stronger international civil society. Contemporary political theorists argue that civil society has often served to strengthen the democratic state. Certainly, associations that engage, train, and empower ordinary men and women serve democracy more effectively than other regimes, but they probably strengthen any state that encourages rather than suppresses associational life. Would they also strengthen the semi-governmental international organizations that now exist? I am inclined to think that they already do this in modest ways and could do so much more extensively.

Imagine a wide range of civic associations—for mutual aid, human rights advocacy, the protection of minorities, the achievement of gender equality, the defense of the environment, the advancement of labor—organized on a much larger scale than at present. All these groups would have centers distinct from the centers of particular states; they would operate across state

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

borders and recruit activists and supporters without reference to nationality. And all of them would be engaged in activities of the sort that governments also ought to be engaged in—and where governmental engagement is more effective when it is seconded (or even initiated) by citizen-volunteers. Once the volunteers were numerous enough, they would bring pressure to bear on particular states to cooperate with each other and with global agencies; and their own work would enhance the effectiveness of the cooperation.

But these associations of volunteers co-exist in international civil society with multinational corporations that command armies of well-paid professional and managerial employees and threaten to overwhelm all other global actors. This is still a threat, not an achievement—the corporations haven't entirely escaped the control of the nation-state—but the threat isn't imaginary. And I can describe only an imaginary set of balancing forces in an expanded civil society: multinational labor unions, for example, and political parties operating across national frontiers. Of course, in a global state or a world empire, multinational corporations would be instantly domesticated, since there would be no place for their multiplication, no borders for them to cross. But that isn't an automatic solution to the problems they create; in domestic society, exactly as in international society, they challenge the regulative and redistributive power of the political authorities. They require a practical, political response, and international civil society provides the best available space for the development of this politics.

Best available, but not necessarily sufficient for the task: it is a feature of the associations of civil society that they run after problems; they react to crises; their ability to anticipate, plan, and prevent lags far behind that of the state. Their activists are more likely to minister heroically to the victims of a plague than to enforce public health measures in advance. They arrive in the battle zone only in time to assist the wounded and shelter the refugees. They struggle to organize a strike against low wages and brutal working conditions, but are unable to shape the economy. They protest environmental diasters that are already disastrous. Even when they predict coming troubles, they have too little institutional power to act effectively; they are not responsible for the state as a whole, and their warnings are often disregarded precisely because they are seen as irresponsible. As for the underlying, long-term problems of international society—insecurity and inequality above all—civil associations are at best mitigating factors: their activists can do many good things, but they can't make peace in a country torn by civil war or redistribute resources on a significant scale.

I WANT to take another step in from the left side of the continuum, but will first summarize the steps so far. Because this next one, and the one after that, will bring us to what seem to me the most attractive possibilities, I need to characterize, perhaps try to name, the less attractive ones already canvassed. Note first that the right side of the continuum is a realm of pluralism and the left side a realm of unity. I am not happy with that description of right and left; there have always been pluralist tendencies on the left, and those are the tendencies that I identify with. Still, it is probably true that unity has been the dominant ambition of leftist parties and movements, so it doesn't make much sense, on this occasion anyway, to fiddle with the rightness and leftness of the continuum.

Starting from the right, then, I have marked off three arrangements, moving in the direction of greater centralization but doing this, paradoxically, by adding to the pluralism of agents. First, there is the anarchy of states, where there are no effective agents except the governments that act in the name of state sovereignty. Next, we add to these governments a plurality of international political and financial organizations, with a kind of authority that limits but doesn't abolish sovereignty. And after that, we add a plurality of international associations that operate across borders and serve to strengthen the constraints on state action. So we have international anarchy and then two degrees of global pluralism.

On the left, I have so far marked off only two arrangements, moving in the direction of greater division but maintaining the idea of a single center. The first is the global state, the least divided of imaginable regimes, whose mem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bers are individual men and women. The second is the global empire, whose members are the subject nations. The hegemony of the imperial nation divides it from the others, without abolishing the others.

THE NEXT STEP in from the left brings with it the end of subjection: the new arrangement is a federation of nation-states, a United States of the World. The strength of the center, of the federal government, will depend on the rights freely ceded to it by the member states and on the direct or indirect character of its jurisdiction over individual citizens. Defenders of what Americans call "states' rights" will argue for a mediated jurisdiction, with fewer rights ceded to the center. Obviously, the greater the mediating role of the member states, the more this arrangement moves rightward on the continuum; if the mediation disappears entirely, we are back at the left end, in the global state. To find a place for this federal regime, we need to imagine a surrender of sovereignty by the member states and then a constitutionally guaranteed functional division of power, such that the states are left with significant responsibilities and the means to fulfill them—a version, then, of the American system, projected internationally. A greatly strengthened United Nations, incorporating the World Bank and the World Court, might approximate this model, so long as it had the power to coerce member states that refused to abide by its resolutions and verdicts. If the UN retained its current structure, with the Security Council as it is now constituted, the global federation would be an oligarchy or perhaps, because the General Assembly represents a kind of democracy, a mixed regime. It isn't easy to imagine any other sort of federation, given the current inequalities of wealth and power among states. The oligarchs won't yield their positions, and any effective federal regime would have to accommodate them (though it might also drain their strength over the long run).

These inequalities are probably harder to deal with than any political differences among the states. Even if all the states were republics, as Kant hoped they would be, the federation would still be wholly or partly oligarchic, so long as the existing distribution of resources was unchanged. And oligarchy here represents division; it drastically qualifies the powers of the center. By contrast, the political character of the member states would tend to become more and more similar; here the move would be toward unity or, at least, uniformity. For all the states would be incorporated into the same constitutional structure, bound, for example, by the same codes of social and political rights and far less able than they are today to ignore those rights. Citizens who think themselves oppressed would appeal to the federal courts and presumably find quick redress. Even if the member states were not democracies to start with, they would become uniformly democratic over time.

As a democrat I ought to find this outcome more attractive than I do; the problem is that it's more likely to be reached by pressure from the center than by democratic activism at (to shift my metaphor) the grassroots. Some combination of the two might work fairly well. But I want to stress that my own preference for democracy doesn't extend to a belief that this preference should be uniformly enforced on every political community. Democracy has to be reached through a political process that, in its nature, can also produce different results. Whenever these results threaten life and liberty, some kind of intervention is necessary, but they don't always do that, and when they don't the different political formations that emerge must be given room to develop (and change). But could a global federation make its peace with political pluralism?

It is far more likely to make its peace with material inequality. A federal regime would probably redistribute resources, but only within limits set by its oligarchs (once again, the European Community provides examples). The greater the power acquired by the central government, the more redistribution there is likely to be. But this kind of power would be dangerous to all the member states, not only to the wealthiest among them. It isn't clear how to strike the balance; presumably that would be one of the central issues in the internal politics of the federation (but there wouldn't be any other politics since, by definition, nothing lies outside the federation).

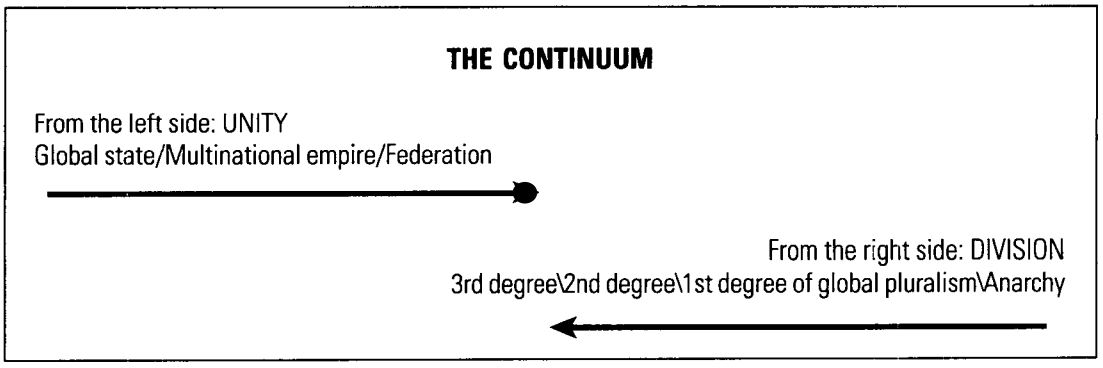
Constitutional guarantees would serve to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

protect national and ethnic/religious groups. This seems to be Kant's assumption: "In such a league, every nation, even the smallest, can expect to have security and rights. . ." (*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*, Seventh Thesis). In fact, however, only those groups that achieved sovereignty before the federation was formed would have a sure place within it. So there would have to be some procedure for recognizing and securing the rights of new groups, as well as a code of rights for individuals without regard to their memberships. Conceivably, the federal regime would turn out to be a guardian of both eccentric groups and individuals—as in the United States, for example, where embattled minorities and idiosyncratic citizens commonly appeal to the central government when they are mistreated by local authorities. When such an appeal doesn't work, however, Americans have options that would not be available to the citizens of a global union: they can carry their appeal to the UN or the World Court or they can move to another country. There is still something to be said for division and pluralism.

Now let's take another step in from the right side and try to imagine a coherent form of division. I have in mind the familiar anarchy of states mitigated and controlled by a threefold set of non-state agents: organizations like the UN, the associations of international civil society, and regional unions like the EC. This is the third degree of global pluralism, and in its fully developed (ideal) version, it offers the largest number of opportunities for political action on behalf of peace, justice, cultural difference, and individual rights; and it poses, at the same time, the smallest risk of global tyranny. Of course, opportunities for action are no more than that; they bring no guarantees; and conflicts are sure to arise among men and women pursuing these different values. I imagine this last regime as providing a context for politics in its fullest sense and for the widest engagement of ordinary citizens.

Consider again the troubling features of the first five, possibly the first six regimes: in some of them it is the decentered world and the self-centered states inhabiting it (whether the states are strong or weak) that threaten our values; in others it is the tyrannical potential of the newly constituted center that poses the danger. So the problem is to overcome the radical decentralization of sovereign states without creating a single all-powerful central regime. And the solution that I want to defend, the third degree of global pluralism, goes roughly like this: create a set of alternative centers and an increasingly dense web of social ties that cross state boundaries. The solution is to build on the institutional structures that now exist, or are slowly coming into existence, and to strengthen all of them, even if they are competitive with one another.


THE CONTINUUM
From the left side: UNITY
Global state/Multinational empire/Federation
From the right side: DIVISION
3rd degree\2nd degree\1st degree of global pluralism\Anarchy

So the third degree of global pluralism requires a UN with a military force of its own capable of humanitarian interventions and a strong version of peacekeeping—but still a force that can only be used with the approval of the Security Council or a very large majority of the General Assembly. Then it requires a World Bank and IMF strong enough to regulate the flow of capital and the forms of international investment and a WTO able to enforce labor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and environmental standards as well as trade agreements—all these, however, must be independently governed, not tightly coordinated with the UN. It requires a World Court with power to make arrests on its own, but needing to seek UN support in the face of opposition from any of the (semi-sovereign) states of international society. Add to these organizations a very large number of civic associations operating internationally, including political parties that run candidates in different countries' elections and labor unions that realize their longstanding goal of international solidarity, as well as single-issue movements of a more familiar kind. The larger the membership of these associations and the wider their extension across state boundaries, the more they would knit together the politics of the global society. But they would never constitute a single center; they would always represent multiple sources of political energy; they would always be diversely focused.

Now add a new layer of governmental organization—the regional federation, of which the EC is only one possible model. It is necessary to imagine both tighter and looser structures, distributed across the globe, perhaps even with overlapping memberships: differently constituted federal unions in different parts of the world. This would bring many of the advantages of a global federation but with greatly reduced risks of tyranny from the center. For it is a crucial feature of regionalism that there will be many centers.

To appreciate the beauty of this pluralist arrangement, one must attach a greater value to political possibility, and the activism it breeds, than to the certainty of political success. To my mind, certainty is always a fantasy, but I don't want to deny that something is lost when one gives up the more unitary versions of globalism. What is lost is the hope of creating a more egalitarian world with a stroke of the pen—a single legislative act enforced from a single center. And the hope of achieving perpetual peace, the end of conflict and violence, everywhere and forever. And the hope of a singular citizenship and a singular identity for all human individuals—so that they would be autonomous men and women, and nothing else.

I must hurry to deny what the argument so far may suggest to many readers: I don't mean to sacrifice all these hopes solely for the sake of "communitarianism"—that is, for the sake of cultural and religious difference. That last is an important value, and it is no doubt well served by the third degree of pluralism (indeed, the different levels of government allow new opportunities for self-expression and autonomy to minority groups hitherto subordinated within the nation-state). But difference as a value exists alongside peace, equality, and autonomy; it doesn't supercede them. My argument is that all these are best pursued politically in circumstances where there are many avenues of pursuit, many agents in pursuit. The dream of a single agent—the enlightened despot, the civilizing imperium, the communist vanguard, the global state—is a delusion. We need many agents, many arenas of activity and decision. Political values have to be defended in different places so that failure here can be a spur to action there, and success there a model for imitation here.

BUT THERE will be failures as well as successes, and before concluding, I need to worry about three possible failures—so as to stress that all the arrangements, including the one I prefer, have their dangers and disadvantages. The first is the possible failure of peacekeeping, which is also, today, a failure to protect ethnic or religious minorities. Wars between and among states will be rare in a densely webbed international society. But the very success of the politics of difference makes for internal conflicts that sometimes reach to "ethnic cleansing" and even genocidal civil war. The claim of all the strongly centered regimes is that this sort of thing will be stopped, but the possible price of doing this, and of maintaining the capacity to do it, is a tyranny without borders, a more "total" regime than the theory of totalitarianism ever envisaged. The danger of all the decentered and multicentered regimes is that no one will stop the awfulness. The third degree of pluralism maximizes the number of agents who might stop it or at least mitigate its effects: individual states acting unilaterally (like the Vietnamese when they shut down the killing fields of Cambodia), alliances and unions of states (like the North Atlantic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Treaty Organization in the Kosovo war), global organizations (like the UN), and the volunteers of international civil society (like Doctors Without Borders). But there is no assigned agent, no singular responsibility; everything waits for political debate and decision—and may wait too long.

The second possible failure is in the promotion of equality. Here too, the third degree of pluralism provides many opportunities for egalitarian reform, and there will surely be many experiments in different societies or at different levels of government (like the Israeli kibbutz or the Scandanavian welfare state or the EC's redistributive efforts or the proposed "Tobin tax" on international financial transactions). But the forces that oppose equality will never have to face the massed power of the globally dispossessed, for there won't be one global arena where this power can be massed. Instead, many organizations will seek to mobilize the dispossessed and express their aspirations, sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing with one another.

The third possible failure is in the defense of individual liberty. Once again, the pluralism of states, cultures, and religions—even if full sovereignty no longer exists anywhere—means that individuals in different settings will be differently entitled and protected. We can (and should) defend some minimal understanding of human rights and seek its universal enforcement, but enforcement in the third degree of pluralism would necessarily involve many agents, hence many arguments and decisions, and the results are bound to be uneven.

Can a regime open to such failures possibly be the most just regime? I only want to argue that it is the political arrangement that most facilitates the everyday pursuit of justice under conditions least dangerous to the overall cause of justice. All the other regimes are worse, including the one on the far left of the continuum for which the highest hopes have been held out. For it is a mistake to imagine Reason in power in a global state—as great a mistake (and a mistake of the same kind) as to imagine the future world order as a millennial kingdom where God is the king. The rulers required by regimes of this kind don't exist or, at least, don't manifest themselves politically. By contrast, the move toward pluralism suits people like us, all-too-real and no more than intermittently reasonable, for whom politics is a "natural" activity.

FINALLY, the move to the third degree of pluralism really is a *move*. We are not there yet; we have "many miles to go before we sleep." The kinds of governmental agencies that are needed in an age of globalization haven't yet been developed; the level of participation in international civil society is much too low; regional federations are still in their beginning stages. Reforms in these institutional areas, however, are rarely sought for their own sake. Few people are sufficiently interested. We will strengthen global pluralism only by using it, by seizing the opportunities it offers. There won't be an advance at any institutional level except in the context of a campaign or, better, a series of campaigns for greater security and greater equality for groups and individuals across the globe. ●

MICHAEL WALZER is a co-editor of *Dissent*. This article was originally given as the Multatuli Lecture at the University of Leuven in Belgium.

Put DISSENT on Your Credit Card!

Our circulation has grown with each issue for the last several years. The largest increase has been in bookstore and newsstand sales. We welcome these new readers, but each copy they buy costs us money, and money is hard to come by for a left magazine. Because the U.S. Post Office, in good social democratic fashion, is the cheapest means of distributing magazines, we make money on subscriptions. Now we've made subscribing easier. You can use your credit card. So, please, subscribe now, and while you are at it, subscribe for two years: that is an even bigger help.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Home Alone

Can America Play the Superpower Role?

Robert V. Daniels

If you listen closely, you can hear a hollow ring to all the triumphalist talk about America's superpower monopoly since the end of the cold war. True, it is a position without precedent for any government since the days of the Roman Empire. But the nation's political leadership cannot agree on what to do with this power, and the American public may not be willing or able to sustain it. "The present danger," wrote Robert Kagan and William Kristol in *Foreign Affairs* early this year, "is that the US . . . will shrink its responsibilities," thereby "frittering away the opportunity to strengthen and extend an international order uniquely favorable to the US." But it is not enough just to press for more military spending and a more vigorous doctrine of intervention, as these authors do. One needs to consider Americans' post–cold war "battle fatigue," as Stanley Hoffmann calls it in *World Disorders*: "fatigue with battles, fatigue both with unilateral interventions and with multilateral agencies and operations not controlled by the US." American tradition, already overstrained by the great international tests of the past century, finds it hard to accommodate the country's new, overweening, but nevertheless exposed position.

Survival and Triumph

A good way to understand Americans' uncertainties as they confront their new world role is to recall two formative events in the early history of the American republic that set up paradigms—bundles of assumptions and reflexes—illuminating much in Americans' thinking ever since. One of these was the War of 1812, the "second war of independence," as it came to be known. Rightly or wrongly, that war went down in American history as the quintessential struggle of an infant democracy to preserve its liberty and assert its identity against a threatening world of evil powers. In *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*, Donald R. Hickey culled some contemporary expressions of this spirit: "We have stood the contest, single-handed, against the conqueror of Europe," boasted Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, and Representative Charles J. Ingersoll of Pennsylvania declaimed, "Who is not proud to feel himself an American—our wrongs revenged—our rights recognized!" Not for nothing did the national anthem derive from that war: "Then conquer we must, for our cause it is just."

The other early experience that shaped Americans' outlook on the world had a very different direction. This was the so-called Second Great Awakening, the religious revival of the 1820s and 1830s that affirmed evangelical rectitude and stimulated American missionary activity all over the world. "Leaders of the Second Great Awakening," says Robert William Fogel in his new study of American reformism, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism*, "preached that the American mission was to build God's kingdom on earth."

These paradigms, deriving from 1812 and the Great Awakening respectively, are not to be confused with the familiar realist-idealist debate in American policy making. They are deeply embedded attitudes, largely beyond consciousness of their origins. For generations they have governed popular responsiveness to competing political appeals, and they still give Americans two almost opposite ways of looking at their international environment.

In the 1812 view, the outside world is a perpetual threat, not only to the country's values but to its very existence. Here is the basis for the philosophy of isolationism: "the original tradition that all subsequent ones purported to serve: *Liberty at home*," as Walter A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

McDougall recently put it in *Promised Land, Crusader State*. Alliances are suspect, in the spirit of George Washington's Farewell Address, particularly if the United States is not in command. The spirit of 1812 encourages Americans not to make sacrifices unless they are directly threatened.

According to the Great Awakening outlook, by contrast, the outside world is not so much a threat as a calling, an opportunity to save the benighted foreigners by exporting the American Way. This is the model for American self-righteousness and moralistic intervention in international affairs, "America's self-assigned role in the world, the. . .democratizing mission," according to Tony Smith in *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century,* or simply the "Wilsonian vision of saving the world," in McDougall's words. Although this national mission was at first conceived of in religious terms, as time went on it became progressively secularized into crusades for democracy and now for what passes as the free market.

At the time of the two world wars and during the cold war, the two paradigms more or less converged around their common presumption of American moral superiority. The 1812 sense of a struggle for survival fused with the Great Awakening spirit of saving the world from the devil. Kagan and Kristol quote the future defense secretary James Forrestal at the moment of U.S. entry into World War II: "America must be the dominant power of the twentieth century." According to Henry Luce, the nation would build "an international moral order."

In Americans' post–cold war triumphalism, the combined 1812 and Great Awakening paradigms have generated a new outburst of national hubris. Joshua Muravchik, for example, titled his exculpatory history of American political warfare during the cold-war era *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America's Destiny.* Looking to a "Pax Americana" based on "the humane idea born in the American experiment," Muravchik writes, "we would stand triumphant . . . achieving by our model and our influence the visionary goal stamped by the founding fathers on the seal of the United States: *novus ordo seclorum*, a new order of the ages." Even more pointedly, William Shawcross (in *Deliver Us from Evil: Peacekeepers, Warlords and a World of Endless Conflict*) cites the former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili's justification of NATO action outside Western Europe: "This is no longer a world where you limit yourself to vital interests. Today, we protect our interests when they are threatened in order to shape the environment to ensure that what develops is in accord with our goals, using American military forces in situations when lesser interests are threatened so they don't grow." These sentiments verge on what the late Senator J. William Fulbright, in his book by that title, called "the arrogance of power."

Hegemony and its Limits

All this confidence notwithstanding, there are internal limits to America's exercise of global hegemony that the superpower triumphalists fail to appreciate. The problem is not material but psychological. Changes in the interests and attitudes of the American public are undercutting all the main elements in the country's superior power—military, economic, and technological.

Although the American economy appears at the moment beyond challenge, with a commanding position in world business and in international financial institutions, a longer term view gives concern. Americans are obsessed with immediate gratification and this year's bottom line; net savings have vanished, private debt continues to mount, and tax-cutting demands defy a still formidable public debt. The nation's chronic and growing trade deficit depends on foreign financing and compounds the de-industrialization of America that has been going on for the last two decades. These trends are not marks of a superpower.

Technologically, the future is at risk because American students don't want to study hard subjects. Engineering schools fill half their ranks with foreign students, and high-tech business is desperate to import the skills it needs—adding a brain imbalance to the nation's chronic trade imbalance. Worse, in this age of competition for technological superiority, the United States suffers from what can only be called mental backwardness. Pop culture based on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sensory overexcitement displaces educational accomplishment. Religious fundamentalism and the superstitiousness abetted by mass media entertainment stand in the way of scientific thinking. If there is change underway in this respect, it is only toward newer or revived forms of mysticism: people know more about astrology than about astronomy.

FOR THIS deficiency of knowledge and attitude, American education is the culprit. To be sure, at the pinnacle of graduate training in elite universities, education and research are still second to none, but the base of the pyramid is porous and shaky. Even at the college level, American students are notorious for their ignorance of basic geography and history. Foreign travel may be up, but foreign language study is in critical decline. In his *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, Ole R. Holsti reports, "The most consistent finding [is that] Americans are poorly informed about most aspects of international affairs." Whatever may be thought about trends in American education in the last half-century, the system has failed to equip the bulk of its students to be citizens of a superpower.

There is a vicious, three-way interaction between education, popular interests, and the media. Interest is dulled by deficient educational background about the world. Short of momentary crises and sensations, the media shy away from what the public lacks interest in—scan the front page of any small-town daily to see this. There are, as in education, niche exceptions for the devoted few, but the media intake of most Americans dilutes their understanding of world affairs even more, and their interest evaporates accordingly. America has become a nation of complacent, even mindless, self-indulgence. We have come a long way from John Kennedy's "pay any price. . . .ask what you can do for your country."

The contradiction between self-indulgence and global power is nowhere clearer than in the new American attitude toward military action. Americans, as their political leaders read them, are unwilling to back any overseas projection of the nation's power that might involve combat fatalities. People still seem to regard their military as citizen draftees rather than professionals paid to risk their lives. Television images prompt demands for America to do something about every inter-ethnic outbreak around the globe (a latter-day reflex of the Great Awakening paradigm), but at the same time they have brought home to a comfortable and risk-averse populace the horror of warfare even on the smallest scale. The Gulf War, tightly censored by the military even though the superiority of the American-led alliance made the defeat of Saddam Hussein a walkaway, stands as the last real military conflict in which the United States engaged voluntarily. Then came the Somalia debacle and the Post-Somalia Syndrome, when television images of a few American bodies being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu soured the American public on armed intervention anywhere. The extraordinarily cautious management of NATO intervention in Kosovo, so that no American would get scratched in combat, proves the point.

This fear of fighting comes on top of demographic changes in modern industrial societies where, as Edward Luttwak in particular has pointed out, families are no longer large enough to accept the risk of their sons' getting killed. The inclusion of women in all roles in the armed forces has made the commitment of troops in real battle even more problematic. The American superpower has, in effect, ruled out the employment of its own military to exert this power, unless the use of force can be sanitized by technological quick fixes.

As the sole superpower, the United States presumes that it is exercising global leadership. Americans are still encouraged in the smug self-image that they lead the world in all the things that American tradition (however inconsistently) holds dear—democracy and prosperity, spirituality and morality, science and technology. In fact, by most measurable indicators of political and material progress, Western Europe has caught up, as has Japan, while Scandinavia has forged ahead. On the newer goals set by the revolution of the 1960s, notably tolerance for ethnic pluralism and the equality of women, the United States took the lead, but once again Europe has largely caught up. In the youth revolt against the authority of experts and educators, Europe led the way in the uprisings of 1968, but the movement has pushed much fur-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ther in America, with disturbing consequences for the nation's educational system and its competitiveness in the knowledge market. America's leading export, after wheat and airplanes, is mass culture, a commodity that policy-making elites practically everywhere else find revolting. And on basic indicators of social health—crime, life expectancy, child poverty—the United States now lags perceptibly among industrialized countries, thanks above all to its failure to address problems of inequality in the modern economy.

The Two Paradigms

Against this backdrop of a deteriorating power base at home, the end of the cold war has opened up the old divisions in the nation's political psyche. There is a new cleavage between the two paradigms about the outside world, corresponding to the national division in the 1930s when the two major parties were polarized between the isolationist camp on one side and the interventionists on the other. The difference now is that the nation is not merely maneuvering in a multipower environment, but swings the clout of a superpower, whichever paradigm it heeds. Sean Kay of Ohio Wesleyan University, writing in *Problems of Post-Communism* ("What Is a Strategic Partnership?" May-June 2000), speaks of "two competing national grand strategies, primacy and balancing."

Under the pull of the 1812 assumptions, fortified by America's new power, the Republicans now incline toward global unilateralism—no one dare try to tell us what to do, while we tell everyone else what to do. As exemplified by George W. Bush's foreign policy adviser Condoleeza Rice in the January-February *Foreign Affairs*, they want to put an end to Wilsonian idealism and set the "national interest" ahead of any "humanitarian interest" or "international community." They don't define "national interest," because, to put it crassly, the national interest boils down to making the world safe for the multinational corporations.

Outside of corporate economics, talk of the "national interest" reflects not world leadership but a determination to use America's superpower status to wall the nation off from the world. Seeking security behind the nuclear shield, the 1812ers went so far last year as to reject the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, confident that America could keep the technological lead in arms. Shortly after that, the Stanley Foundation's UN Issues Conference warned, "Increasing US tendencies toward exceptionalism and unilateral action are reducing the effectiveness of multilateral organization."

Designedly so. The 1812ers have always harbored a deep antipathy toward the UN and any semblance of international authority to which the United States might be subject. They block payment of the country's back dues owed the UN, though they are eager to commit infinitely larger sums to the maintenance of national military power. They carp at support for international peacekeeping operations—though this is one way to play the superpower while minimizing the risk of American casualties. Last April, the House of Representatives was barely dissuaded from defunding American forces in Kosovo. Yet the 1812ers talk tough: Rice's complaint about Kosovo was that "the administration . . . was not, at the start, committed to the decisive use of force."

The Democrats, for their part, remain more sensitive to Great Awakening missions and the politics of balance—let's work together to resolve the world's problems, as long as you acknowledge our leading role. However, under the stress of presidential campaigning, everyone has been drawn further toward the 1812 principle of military power as the guarantee of security for a self-satisfied America. So the Democrats are left to waffle between competing with Republican militarism and defending a rational view of the world.

Whether they are aligned with the 1812 paradigm or the Great Awakening paradigm, Americans have a hard time putting themselves in other nations' shoes. The 1812 devotees of military security cannot grasp how America's preponderance of power could appear to Russia or China not defensive but potentially offensive. The adherents of the secularized Great Awakening cannot comprehend the resentment abroad of America's presumption of moral superiority, though the United States would never accept corresponding missions of religious or political uplift in reverse—note only its rejection of Marxism. What was once the world's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most revolutionary country, in the early nineteenth century, had become a century later the most counterrevolutionary.

For all the talk of allies and cooperation, Americans refuse to accept full reciprocity of responsibilities and obligations. Though ever since Nuremberg it has been a vigorous advocate for international justice, the American government rejects any jurisdiction over its own military forces on the part of international judicial bodies. It goes without saying that American troops can never be allowed to operate under foreign command. Indeed, an early blunder in cold-war alliance politics was the U.S. reluctance to rotate the military command of NATO and give the French the second crack at it following General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Star Wars II

All the contradictions in America's stance toward the outside world come together in the so-called National Missile Defense (NMD) or "Star Wars II." This resurrection of Ronald Reagan's celestial dream has been seized upon by the Republicans, with encouragement from the military contractors, to embarrass the Democrats. To protect its political right flank, the Clinton administration has felt driven to follow suit with its own version of the scheme, regardless of doubts about its cost and effectiveness. It seems that the national psyche cannot manage without a substitute for the cold war.

NMD is a perfect embodiment of the 1812 paradigm. It is, after all, a project for "defense," to ward off threats from the "rogue nations" who have conveniently popped up to take the place of the Soviet menace. It is "national," aiming first of all to protect the United States. And it is "missile," that is, a resort to technological superiority to substitute for the two oceans in guaranteeing America's security against the evil forces "out there" who plot to do the United States in, notwithstanding its overwhelming preemptive and retaliatory power. The cocoon of miracle technology that Americans spin about themselves will presumably suffice to shield them from the rogue devils, allowing the leaders of both parties to display maximum toughness toward outsiders without risking the blood of a single American soldier.

Why one of these pipsqueak adversaries would attempt a suicidal nuclear missile attack on the United States, if it ever could, has never been figured out. America seems to be driven by a psychology of chagrin, coupled with the "threat exaggeration" analyzed by Robert H. Johnson (*Improbable Dangers: U.S. Conceptions of Threat in the Cold War and After*). The alleged "rogues" are all weak, mostly Muslim countries that have piqued the United States by successful acts of defiance in the past, so they must be treated as enemies to the death. "Rogue states," said Secretary of State Madeleine Albright three years ago, "are there with the sole purpose of destroying . . . the international system." Condoleeza Rice worries, preposterously, that "fundamentalist Islam" would try to undo the whole American-dominated "international system based on markets and democracy."

The rogue-nation panic reflects the 1812 paradigm at work in American thinking. If nuclear attack by a rogue state were a real danger, it would be logical to develop a broad international response. Yet until the current presidential campaign prompted extension of projected missile defense coverage to America's skeptical allies, the scheme has been couched in strictly American terms.

The question of whether NMD would work, or by any stretch of the imagination justify its probable cost, any more than its ancestor the Strategic Defense Initiative-Star Wars is not as important as the political and economic interests that are served in attempting it anyway. The fact that NMD would upset arms control treaties with Russia, antagonize China, and strain relations with America's European allies matters not to the 1812ers. They are tired of conciliating allies and putting up with treaty restrictions on America's ability to defend itself. Even more to the point, as the *Washington Post* showed (June 4, 2000), NMD has been vigorously promoted by the same industrial interests that would get the lion's share of the contracts to build the system. NATO expansion was similarly driven—American arms and planes could be sold to the new member countries in Eastern Europe, paid for ultimately by American taxpayers. At the governmental level there is little resistance to such pressures, given the political need to appear to stand tough

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against foreign enemies. Economic and political interests neatly dovetail.

Superpower is not total power, the triumphalists notwithstanding, and it will not last forever, if only because of the potential among other major countries (not just the alleged "rogues") to combine their demographic weight with military know-how and conclude countervailing alliances. The United States cannot indefinitely function as a world policeman nor even as a "reluctant sheriff," as Richard Haas put it in his recent book of that title, nor can it use its power to impose American "interests" without stimulating wide reactions against American hegemony. On the other hand, when a superpower begins behaving as if it were a beleaguered outpost with the world against it, its suspicions are likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The future holds unpredictable hazards, as the world comes to see that the American superpower has neither the political will nor the psychological stamina to sustain the role it has been cast in. ●

ROBERT V. DANIELS, professor emeritus of history at the University of Vermont, is author of *Russia: The Roots of Confrontation* and *The End of the Communist Revolution*.

2000 STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

(Required by 39 U. S. C. 3685)

1. Publication title: *Dissent*. 2. Publication No.: 158-080. 3. Filing date: October 1, 2000. 4. Issue frequency: quarterly. 5. No. of issues published annually: four. 6. Annual subscription price: $22 individual; $34 inst. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025; contact: Michael Walzer, 212-316-3120. 8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher: same as above. 9. Full names and complete mailing addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor. Publisher: Michael Walzer, Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025. Editor: Mitchell Cohen, Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025. Managing Editor: Maxine Phillips, 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025. 10. Owner: Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas, 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025. 11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None. 12. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal tax purposes has not changed during the preceding twelve months. 13. Publication name: *Dissent*. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: Summer 2000. 15. Extent and nature of circulation: a. total no. copies (net press run): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,575; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 13,100. b. paid and/or requested circulation (1) paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541 (include advertisers' proof copies/exchange copies): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 4,234; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 3,849; (2) paid in-county subscriptions stated on Form 3541 (include advertisers' proof copies/exchange copies): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: none; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: none; (3) sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 4,540; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 4,300; (4) other classes mailed through the USPS: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 518; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 462. c. total paid and/or requested circulation [sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4)]: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 9,292; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 8,611. d. free distribution by mail (samples, complimentary, and other free) (1) outside-county as stated on Form 3541: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 152; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 139; (2) in-county as stated on Form 3541: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: none; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: none; (3) other classes mailed through the USPS: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 58; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 34. e. free distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: none; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: none. f. total free distribution (sum of 15d and 15e): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 210; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 173. g. total distribution (sum of 15c and 15f): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 9,502; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 8,784. h. copies not distributed: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 2,073; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 4,316. i. total (sum of 15g and 15h: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 11,575; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 13,100. Percent paid and/or requested circulation (15c/15g x 100): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 97.79%; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 98.03%. 16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the Fall 2000 issue of this publication. 17. Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner: Maxine Phillips, Managing Editor. Date: September 6, 2000.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Social Democracy in One Country?

Göran Therborn

Social democracy has always been a national project, usually with a veneer of internationalist rhetoric and transnational sympathy, but never drifting far from the "national interest." The year 1914 provided the decisive test in this respect. Nowhere did social democrats cry for war, but everywhere the majority of them followed their national flags into one military alliance or the other or alternatively into a policy of neutrality in alliance with the right. Social democratic reform has always focused on the domestic state, democratizing it, making it socially responsible, economically interventionist, and redistributive. The successes have been uneven, but undeniable. In Scandinavia they have been impressively comprehensive and enduring.

In other words, social democracy in one country has been possible, and single-country social democracy has been the only actually existing one.

True, Scandinavia is a peripheral sub-Arctic region of its own, its labor movements historically linked, its social democratic parties maintaining close touch in office, with considerable inter-governmental contact and exchange of ideas. However, no Scandinavian social democratic program was ever developed. The governing social democracies of the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s actually lagged behind the Scandinavian law commissions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which produced important proposals in commercial and family law. Swedish social democrats gave money to their Finnish comrades fighting communists in trade union elections, but on a more institutional, governmental level there was no help. Each country was on its own. After World War II, Swedish social democrats tried to expand their own successful war neutrality into a Scandinavian defense union, but the leading Norwegian social democrats preferred the American army and the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) to a Scandinavian alliance.

Currently, the European Union (EU) is mainly run by social democratic governments. For the first time in postwar history, the four major countries of Western Europe have social democratic governments (Britain, France, Germany, and Italy), and social democrats are governing or co-governing in nine of the other eleven member states. Has that made for a common social democratic Europe? There is certainly no such project explicitly on the agenda. Social democracy has not led to a more peaceful Europe, as shown by the enthusiastic British and German engagement in the Kosovo war and the British commitment to continue, with the United States, the (economic-cum-low-intensity-military) war against Iraq. Nor is there any renewed European commitment to equality, a basic component of left and center-left politics.

On the other hand, the shift from Christian democracy to social democracy is discernible in contemporary European politics: symbolically, in the boycott of Austria and the welcoming of Turkey (upon U.S. president Bill Clinton's insistence); more substantially in the adoption of employment targets at the Lisbon summit last March. But the symbolic as well as the substantial politics are ambiguous. The boycott of Austria is constitutionally dubious, and the overcoming of anti-Muslim prejudice against Turkey requires accepting the cold war logic of the U.S. government, that Serbs should be put down for trying to put down Albanians, whereas Turks putting down Kurds should be upheld for being anti-Russian and pro-Israeli.

Full employment was once a major social democratic slogan and policy objective—mean-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing that the state was responsible for maintaining an economy where all who wanted to work could do so. Although orthodox neoliberals have refused to accept any employment goals, the growth of low-paid jobs in America has provided a model for many people in Europe, who argue that a major plank of employment policy should be screwing the unemployed. In the line-up of the Lisbon summit, British prime minister Tony Blair concocted a joint paper with the postcommunist prime minister of Italy, Massimo D'Alema, calling for more pressure on, and lower benefits for, the unemployed. The Swedish prime minister, who is—for better or worse—a quintessential first-way social democrat, expressed his shock at this foray into the terrain of neoliberalism.

The Challenge of Globalization

Can this first-way social democratic project of national reform survive the onslaught of globalization? Anthony Giddens, who has become the spokesperson for Blairism/Clintonism with a human face, and its intellectual fig leaf, has argued that one of the characteristics of third-way social democracy is "taking globalization seriously." The meaning of this, like everything attached to Messieurs Blair, Clinton, & Co., is a bit woolly. But let us formulate the issue in the first-way mode. To what extent are social democratic, one-country-at-a-time policies of making capitalism behave possible under the current constraints of the global economy?

Globalism has often been a source of the diffusion of hegemonic ideas and models. Confronting it, critical minds should be on high alert—as with the opposite discourse of national "authenticity," often the drapery of traditional privilege and prejudice.

I had better define "globalization" in a cool and analytical way, as something neither good nor bad in itself. It refers to tendencies toward a worldwide reach and impact of social phenomena. It includes satellite television as well as the intercontinental hybridization of popular music, the United Nations (UN) environmental and women's conferences as well as worldwide currency speculation, new waves of migration as well as movements of capital. However multidimensional, the power of globalization is clearly asymmetrical, creating vastly more resources and opportunities for capital than for people. Now, does this strengthened global power of capital make national social democratic policies unviable?

The empirical answer to that question is no. There are still very imporant national differences and space for national socio-economic policies. The problem of first-way social democracy is not so much global constraint as internal social differentiation and ideological demoralization.

We may gauge the room available for national social democratic policies by looking at three particularly relevant areas: social protection, redistribution, and institutional ordering.

Capacities for Protection

All social contracts are about protection, against abuses of power above all. The labor movement and social democracy have been concerned mainly with abuses of capital's power and with human risks and adversities caused by the market. Job safety regulations; employee rights; and market-independent social entitlements, such as unemployment compensation, sickness benefits, pensions, and access to health care, have been among the major mechanisms of social protection built up in the course of the twentieth century.

In the currently hegemonic culture, "protection" is not held in high esteem—in contrast to "competition," "risk-taking," and "entrepreneurship." If the prophets (and also the doomsayers) of globalization are to be believed, it is dead, dying, or in any case hopelessly backward. But reality is a bit more complex than ideology, and occasionally even the opposite of it. First of all, the most generous, the most protective welfare states in the world were constructed in small, open economies, heavily dependent on the world market for selling their products. This is still the case today.

The historical connection of world market openness and dependence, on the one hand, and generous welfare states, on the other, is still robust. There is a not insignificant positive statistical correlation between the two. The link, however, is not causal. Rather, the point is that domestic constellations of power decide social developments, and that the world market is not in itself an important constraint. This

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Table 1
Export Dependency and Social Transfers 1990–1997
Exports of goods and services and public social transfer payments as percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

country	exports	social transfers
USA	10.8	12.6
Japan	10.0	12.3
EU-15	28.1	19.1a
Germany	24.6	17.6
France	23.4	22.8
Italy	23.5	19.0a
UK	26.4	14.0b
Canada	32.9	12.6
Australia	18.9	11.1a
Austria	39.3	21.1a
Belgium	66.8	23.5
Denmark	35.9	20.2c
Finland	32.1	22a
Greece	16.2	16.0c
Ireland	68.2	14.2a
Netherlands	53.1	25.5a
Norway	39.5	16.1
Portugal	30.4	12.9c
Spain	21.4	17.3a
Sweden	34.9	22.8a
Switzerland	36.1	16.1c

a 1999–1996 b 1990–1994 c 1990–1995

The table contains all the old Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) members, save New Zealand, for which social transfer data are lacking.

Correlation of export dependency and social protection (EU average not included): r = 0.26

Source: OECD, *Historical Statistics 1960-1997* (Paris: OECD, 1999), tables 6.3 and 6.12.

may change in the future, but we are not there yet, and, as we shall see below, national institutions and practices keep much of their variation.

In the crises of the 1970s and early 1980s, an institutionalized commitment to full employment could protect the workforce from massive unemployment.[1] But the 1990s saw two spectacular failures in this respect, Finland and Sweden, with an average unemployment rate for 1990-1997 of 12.1 percent in the former and 7.1 percent in the latter. Had globalization finally caught up with the full employment commitment of first-way social democracy?

An affirmative answer would be a rush to judgment. What happened was that both countries ran into a deep financial crisis in the early 1990s, virtually bankrupting the whole banking system—which had to be bailed out by public money. This crisis in turn was caused by the bursting of a speculative bubble, generated by real estate prices in an inflationary economy and a lifting of capital controls. Swedish social democracy at the time was turning in what later became known as a third-way direction: concentrating on bringing inflation down, deregulation, and income tax cuts. When the storm clouds gathered, the social democratic gaze was elsewhere than on the labor market. Popular frustration with the government's indifference led to the victory of a bourgeois coalition in 1991, which also had priorities other than full employment. So the labor market was allowed to crash in 1992-1993. In Finland, the financial crisis was aggravated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its economy, formerly a major Finnish export market.

But the rate of unemployment is not the end of the story. What happened to the unemployed? Here the capacity for social protection is still vigorous. In the mid-1990s, to be unemployed in Britain or Italy often meant to be poor: two of every five unemployed men and women had less than half the average disposable income in their country. Among the unemployed in Nordic countries, only one in ten was poor in this sense.[2]

Treating the unemployed decently doesn't mean keeping the total employment rate low or maintaining high unemployment. The proportion of Finns aged fifteen to sixty-four who were employed stayed above the EU average all through the 1990s. The Swedish average employment rate for 1990-1997 was higher than the U.S. rate, 74.0 percent to 72.9 percent. From the end of 1997 to the end of 1999, the Finnish rate of unemployment went down from 11.9 percent to 9.9 percent, and the Swedish from 8.9 percent to 6.6 percent. In March 2000, Swedish unemployment was down to 5.5 percent, and is expected to fall to about 4 percent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by the end of this year.

Protection against poverty may be taken as a criterion of a decent developed society. Among rich countries, in this respect the United States is in a class of its own. Being poor in the United States means to be much poorer, in U.S. dollars, than being poor in Western Europe. In the early 1990s, if you had a disposable income less than 90 percent of your compatriots—if you were in what statisticians call the tenth percentile—you had 36 percent of the median income in the United States, but higher percentages of median income in Italy (42 percent), Finland (44 percent), and Belgium and Sweden (49 percent).[3]

The risk of becoming, as well as of remaining poor, is higher in the Anglo-Saxon countries than in the continental European welfare states shaped by social democracy or Christian democracy.

Table 2
Relative Poverty 1991–1996

Percentage of the population with a disposable income less than half of the national median, taking household composition into account

country	poor throughout	poor at least once
USA a	4.6	26.0
UK	6.1	38.4
Canada b	1.8	28.1
Sweden	1.1	11.9
Netherlands	0.8	12.1
Germany	1.8	19.9

a 1988-1993 b 1990-1995

Source: H. Oxley, et al., "Poverty Dynamics in Six Countries," *OECD Economic Studies* no. 30 (Paris: OECD, 2000), p. 14.

Redistribution and the Range of Inequality

Equality has always been a key value of the left. It springs both from the left's social origins among the excluded, downtrodden, and non-privileged, and from a principled democratic conception of a community of free equals. Although often sniped at by old Stalinists and current third wayers, equality is a core value of social democracy. Today, given the range of human diversity (which the democratic left has always regarded as an indicator of the rich potential of human life), equality of resources and opportunities, in contrast to the more clear-cut equality of rights, is more a principle and a goal than a condition. The borderline between unjust inequalities and legitimate rewards or necessary incentives is fuzzy and contingent.

This does not mean, however, that inequality cannot be approached critically and concretely. Although inequalities alone may be difficult to pin down, other than in abstract philosophical terms, we may use the common, pragmatic "best practice" criterion. So we will call unjust any country's inequalities that exceed those of the countries with the lowest rate of inequalities, given a similar level of development, under conditions of political democracy and individual self-realization.

Taking Scandinavia around 1980 as a benchmark in the above sense, we can say, for example, that income inequality above a Gini index of 0.2 is excessive and unjust. British and American income inequality in the early 1990s was 60 percent to 65 percent excessive. By the late 1990s, a third of the British and almost half of American disposable income inequality was excessive in this sense.[4]

The overall current trend of income distribution is toward more inequality, between countries as well as within them. On the world scale, the main tendencies in the first half of the 1990s were the widening abyss between populous rural Asia and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) world, the growing urban-rural gap in the large countries of Asia (between urban China on the one hand and rural India, Bangladesh, and China on the other), and the internal polarization of postcommunist Europe.[5] However, among the OECD countries of Western Europe, North America, and Oceania there is no obvious common trend. The 1966-1994 time line of inequality of disposable income is slightly concave, with its lowest values in the early 1980s, but its main overall contour is one of persistent national differences.[6]

Redistribution in nation-states has changed recently, clearly moving downward in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

United States and the United Kingdom, but state capacity hasn't declined. Therefore, the OECD record of disposable post-tax and post-transfer income in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s is very uneven. In spite of depression and mass unemployment, Finland maintained its low level of inequality in the 1990s. Germany remained stable in the 1980s, but moved toward somewhat greater inequality in the early 1990s. Disposable income in France became more equal, while Italy's has fluctuated up and down, back up to its 1980 level since 1990. Equality in Sweden declined in the 1990s but remained at the low end of the OECD range.[7] The tax structure of the developed world also remains highly differentiated.

Table 3
Tax Shares of GDP in 1997

Shares of personal income and total taxes in percent of GDP

area	income tax	total taxes
USA	11.0	28.3
Japan	5.9	28.6
EU	11.6	41.4
Scandinavia a	19.1	48.8

a Unweighted average of Denmark, Finland, mainland Norway except its North Sea oil and gas, and Sweden

Source: OECD, *Economic Survey of Norway* (Paris: OECD, 2000), p. 96.

Is there a price for egalitarianism? Within the bounds we are talking about here, no honest person could possibly argue for a price in terms of innovation. Finland and Sweden are currently the two most advanced countries in Europe and perhaps, allowing for their size, in the world, in terms of the new electronic economy—Internet connections per capita and e-business. The background is the old strength of telephony in Scandinavia, going back, with Ericsson, more than a century; an advanced and broad technical education; new entrepreneurship, as in the Finnish company Nokia; and public managers who were open early on to letting national champions compete.

First-way social democrats naturally tend to get irritated when Anglo-Saxon third wayers, who live in the most unequal of the rich countries, argue that more equality is impossible. To sweeten the pill they say that they are all in favor of equality of opportunity. Fine, equal opportunity is the patina of nineteenth-century liberalism. But an enormous amount of research on social mobility and educational opportunity points conclusively to the massive reproduction of inter-generational class and ethnic privilege. With regard to gender there has been more success in recent times, for reasons still not quite understood. Researchers have found what many people would suspect anyway: if the resources and horizons of parents are similar rather than significantly different, their children will have more equal opportunities: less inequality makes for greater mobility.[8]

In other words, to oppose equality of conditions to equality of opportunity and portray the latter as less interventionist with regard to the logics of privilege and the market is a sign of not taking equal opportunity seriously.

National Institutions Matter

Protection against the onslaught of inhuman powers was the immediate demand and first achievement of the labor movement. Redistribution of the outcomes of property division and market power was the second demand and achievement. Protection and redistribution were embodied in social institutions and in enforceable rights and public agencies of monitoring and implementation. But social democracy has also raised the issue of institutional re-ordering more generally, focusing on democratic citizenship and labor rights. This institutional challenge by labor was variably successful and issued in different historical forms. The current question is, do these historically evolved institutions matter any more?

They do, because the institutional authority of labor makes a considerable difference in very concrete ways to the life chances of ordinary people.

There are two key dimensions to these national institutions of labor market relations. One is obviously the rate of trade unionization (union density). The other is the scope of col-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lective bargaining. The former may be taken as an indicator of labor power, the latter as a sign of labor legitimacy, as this is recognized by courts, employers' organizations, and governments. The latter is often discussed in terms of bargaining systems, formats of interest representation, processes of socio-economic policy making, and structures of "corporatism." For a brief overview such as this, the main international differences are captured by the proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining.

Table 4
Trade Union Density and Coverage of Collective Bargaining in 1995

Percentage of wage and salary earners

country	union density	bargaining coverage
USA	14.2	11.2
Australia	35.2	65.0
Canada	37.4	37.0
Japan	24.0	25.0
Austria	41.2	n.d.
Belgium	51.9	n.d.
Denmark	80.1	55.0
Finland	79.3	n.d.
France	9.1	90.0
Germany	28.9	90.0
Greece	24.1	90.0
Ireland	48.9	90.0
Italy	44.1	n.d.
Netherlands	25.6	80.0
Norway	57.7	66.0
Portugal	25.6	n.d.
Spain	18.6	82.0
Sweden	91.1	85.0
Switzerland	22.5	n.d.
UK	32.9	25.6

Source: ILO, *World Labour Report 1997-98* (Geneva: ILO, 1997), tables 1.2 and 3.2.

Trade unionism and collective bargaining differ widely across developed nation-states. Most striking is the variation of the coverage, and thereby the legitimacy of collective bargaining. It is high across West Europe, regardless of the strength of trade union membership. As usual, the British Isles are out in the Atlantic Ocean, rather than part of Europe. Notice the huge difference between the world's two greatest exporters, the United States and Germany. Most European labor contracts are shaped by collective bargaining, even if only a minority of the workers are paid-up union members. In other words, the rights of labor have been institutionalized as collective social rights, in a sense similar to democratic citizenship rights—which are valid even for people who are not members of political parties and don't vote in elections.

Even under the constraints of the world market, specific national institutions are viable, including ones directly bearing upon the power of capital. It is also striking that trade union membership and density increased significantly in the Scandinavian countries between 1975 and 1995, while staying the same in Belgium, and declining elsewhere.[9] A more detailed and recent calculation of Swedish trade unionism shows a historical peak in 1993, but also a rate of unionization among private, white-collar employees of 71 percent in 1998.[10]

The Power of Social Democracy

Most defenders of globalization have been forced to concede that nations and nationally rooted religious movements are resistant and vigorous. If they are clearheaded enough, they would also recognize the resilience and potential power of national reform. First-way social democracy still has room to maneuver in the world of globalization. The problem is not global economic competition, but internal competition among social democrats over political power and interpretations of the world. ●

GÖRAN THERBORN is a sociologist and co-director of the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences at Uppsala.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1. Göran Therborn, *Why Some Peoples Are More Unemployed Than Others* (London: Verso, 1986).

2. J. Vogel, *Living Conditions and Inequality in the European Union* (Luxembourg: Eurostat Working Papers, 1997), tables 5.4 and 8.8. The calculations take the households of the unemployed into account.

3. P. Gottschalk and T. Smeeding, "Cross-National Comparisons of Earnings and Income Inequality," *Journal of Economic Literature* vol XXXV (June 1997), p. 663.

4. The Gini index runs between 0, total equality, and 1. The world's most unequal societies, such as Brazil and South Africa, have a value of about 0.6. A. Atkinson et al., *Income Distribution in OECD Countries* (Paris: OECD, 1995), p. 49; B. Gustafsson and M. Johansson, "In Search of Smoking Guns: What Makes Income Inequality Vary over Time in Different Countries?", *American Sociological Review* (vol. 64, 1999), p 590; P. Gottschalk and T. Smeeding, "Cross-National Comparisons of Earnings and Income Inequality," *Journal of Economic Literature* (vol. xxxv, June 1997), p. 661; A. Atkinson, "The Distribution of Income in the UK and OECD Countries in the Twentieth Century," *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* (vol. 15, 1999), p. 64.

5. B. Milanovic, "True World Income Distribution, 1988 and 1993: First Calculation Based on Household Survey Alone," World Bank working paper, 1999.

6. B. Gustafsson and M. Johansson, "In Search of Smoking Guns: What Makes Income Inequality Vary over Time in Different Countries?", *American Sociological Review* (vol. 64, 1999), p. 591

7. Gottshalk and Smeeding, op. cit., p. 666; Gustafsson and Johansson, op cit., p. 590; Atkinson 1999, op. cit., pp. 64, 69-70.

8. See further, Y. Shavit and H.P. Blossfeld eds., *Persistent Inequality. Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries* (Westview Press, 1993).

9. B. Ebbinghaus and J. Visser, "When Institutions Matter . Union Growth and Decline in Western Europe, 1950-1995," *European Sociological Review* (vol 15, 1999), p. 147.

10. A. Kjellberg, 'Facklig organisering och arbetsmarknad: marginalisering av ungdomar och invandrae?', in S. Tegle ed.), *Hur har den svenska modellen överlevt krisen?* (Stockholm: Arbetlivsinstitutet, 2000), p.120.

MONTHLY REVIEW
A SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

After Seattle: A New Internationalism?

The protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in November and December 1999 surprised people across the globe. Readers familiar with recent protests against international financial institutions and transnational corporations, including the ones against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in April 2000, will find fresh analysis here and those who are new to the issues will discover clear, accessible approaches to some of the burning questions of our time. Written for a wide audience, this special issue of *Monthly Review* promises to be a useful tool for scholars as well as activists.

C O N T E N T S

Toward a New Internationalism by the Editors
Marx and Internationalism by John Bellamy Foster
The Language of Globalization by Peter Marcuse
Turtles, Teamsters, and Capital's Designs by William K. Tabb
"Workers of All Countries, Unite" by Michael Yates
The Future of the Labor Left by Khalil Hassan
World Labor Needs Independence and Solidarity by David Bacon
Strategic Thinking About Movement Building by Martin Hart-Landsberg
Defunding the Fund, Running on the Bank by Patrick Bond
Where Was the Color in Seattle? by Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez
Address to the South Summit by Fidel Castro

TO ORDER

1-4 copies: $10 ea. / 5-24 copies: $8 ea. / 25-50 copies: $6 ea./ postage: add $3 for 1-4 copies, $7 for 5-25 copies, $12 for 25-50 copies

MONTHLY REVIEW / 122 West 27th Street, 10th floor / New York, NY 10001 / www.monthlyreview.org / Toll-Free: 1.800.670.9499

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rediscovering Social Democracy

Sheri Berman

TWO SHIBBOLETHS dominate contemporary discussion about the future of the left in advanced industrial democracies. The first is that globalization is creating a fundamentally new environment for leaders and publics, imposing burdens and constraining choices. The second is that traditional social democracy has played itself out as a political ideology, creating a vacuum that can and should be filled by some new progressive movement with greater contemporary relevance.

Ironically, however, the very conditions that lead so many observers to proclaim social democracy's demise provide an excellent context for its re-examination and possibly even its resurgence, albeit in somewhat different form. This is because the issue at the heart of contemporary globalization debates—whether states can dominate market forces or must bow before them—is in fact very old. Indeed, social democracy emerged from similar debates within the international socialist movement a century ago. Those debates have been forgotten or misunderstood, and that's why many contemporary discussions of social democracy are so superficial and intellectually impoverished.

These days, having been abused by friends and foes alike over the years, the term "social democracy" is more an epithet or a banner than a meaningful designation. Very few people, even among its own members, could give a coherent definition of the movement's nature or goals. Underneath the confusion, however, two broad views can be discerned. The first, often espoused by critics, sees social democracy as an unstable half-way house between Marxism and liberalism, cobbled together from elements of different and incompatible traditions; social democrats are basically socialists without the courage of their revolutionary convictions. The second view, often held by supporters, sees the movement as an effort to implement particular policies or uphold certain values; social democrats are the champions of the welfare state, or equality, or solidarity. Each view contains some truth, but both miss the larger picture. Properly understood, social democracy is far more than a particular program. It is neither watered-down Marxism nor bulked-up liberalism, but rather a full-fledged alternative to both. Apprehending the true nature of this ideology, however, requires returning to the circumstances of its birth.

The Origins

The first half of the nineteenth century was the golden age of liberalism, which emerged alongside the industrial revolution as the first modern political and economic ideology. In many parts of Western Europe, liberalism appeared as a progressive and even revolutionary force, promising to break down the remaining structures of the old regime and replace them with a system based on individualism, rationalism, and permanent economic progress. Yet by the middle of the century, the practical consequences of unfettered capitalism—dramatic inequalities, social dislocation, and atomization—led to a backlash against liberalism and a search for alternatives.

Marxism offered the most powerful challenge from the left, and during the second half of the century it gathered many adherents and spawned its own political movement. Yet Marx's thought contained important gaps and discrepancies. For example, Marx had little to say about the actual transition from capitalism to socialism or about how socialist parties might help bring such a transition about. Furthermore, his belief that socialist society would be harmonious and prosperous implied that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there would be little need for the political institutions that contemporary societies depend on to suppress and moderate conflict. So, Marx neglected politics, even as he devoted immense effort to philosophy, sociology, and economics.

These oversights were exacerbated by the increasing materialism and determinism of Marx's thought and the tendency of his followers to emphasize just these aspects of Marxism. Engels, for example, indicated where he believed Marx's true legacy lay when he characterized the master at his funeral as the Darwin of socialism—the man who "discovered the laws of development of human history." Historical materialism and the primacy of economics were central to Engels, and it was through his writings that the scientific, orthodox Marxism of the Second International was codified.

By the end of the century, however, opposition to both economic determinism and political passivity was growing on the left. One of its sources was the recognition that many Marxist predictions had not come to pass. The proletariat was not being immiserated, small farms were not disappearing, and general economic collapse seemed increasingly far off. Capitalism as a system had developed new vigor, while the bourgeois state had undertaken important political, economic, and social reforms.

Another source of opposition came from the sense that orthodox Marxism had failings not merely as a guide to history, but also as a guide to constructive political action. Socialist parties had become powerful actors in a number of European countries, yet Marxism could not furnish them with a strategy for using their power to achieve their goals. Indeed, it had little to say about the long-term role of political organizations in general, because it considered economic forces and not political activism to be history's prime mover. Then as now, therefore, many on the left faced a troubling dilemma: capitalism was flourishing, yet was still accompanied by the economic injustices and social fragmentation that had motivated the Marxist project in the first place. Orthodox Marxism offered only a counsel of passivity: wait for the "contradictions" within capitalism to bring the system down. It was in response to these problems and frustrations that social democracy emerged.

The Rise of Revisionism

If socialism was not going to come about simply because it was inevitable (as Marx, Engels, and many of their most influential followers believed), then it would have to be achieved as the result of human action. Some activists, like Lenin, felt that this achievement could be imposed by force, and set out to spur history along through the politico-military efforts of a revolutionary vanguard. Others, not willing to accept the violence or elitism of such a course, chose to revamp the socialist program so as to attract the support of a majority of society. They felt that if the triumph of socialism was not inevitable, it could be made *desirable*.

These democratic revisionists rejected the pseudo-scientific and materialist justifications of socialism proffered by orthodox Marxists and called for a rediscovery of socialism's moral roots, for an emphasis on the ideals underpinning the original project. Although their ideas and actions often emerged independently and differed according to local context, the revisionists shared an emphasis on the desirability rather than the necessity of socialism, on morality and ethics as opposed to science and materialism, and on human will and cross-class cooperation rather than irresistible economic forces and inevitable class conflict. By the early twentieth century the gulf between democratic revisionists and orthodox Marxists made the international socialist movement, like many of its constituent parties, a house divided against itself.

The schism was epitomized by the debate in Germany between Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. The former, the leading interpreter of Marx's thought in the generation after Engels's death, espoused a deterministic and scientific view of socialism. According to Kautsky, the role of socialists was not to argue for the moral superiority of their views but rather to recognize the causal and "objective" nature of material reality. In this view, "irresistible economic forces led with the certainty of doom to the shipwreck of capitalistic production." Kautsky taught socialists to recognize that their "goal could only be achieved through a revolution," but that this revolution was not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in their power to make: "The revolution cannot be arbitrarily made by us any more than it is possible for our opponents to hinder it."

Bernstein's apostasy began when he saw that many orthodox Marxist predictions were not being fulfilled. He argued, for example, that capitalism was not leading to an increasing concentration of wealth and the immiseration of society; indeed, he believed that during the late nineteenth century it was becoming increasingly complex and adaptable. These observations reinforced Bernstein's opposition to the view that socialism would emerge only after capitalism's collapse, and he argued that it could and should be reformed. In his view, the prospects for socialism depended "not on the decrease but on the increase of . . . wealth," and on the ability of socialists to come up with "positive suggestions for reform," capable of spurring fundamental change.

Bernstein's loss of belief in the inevitability of socialism led to his rejection of one of the main pillars of orthodoxy—historical materialism—and to a new appreciation of the potential for human will and political action. He believed that faith in the inevitable future bred a dangerous passivity that would cost socialists the enthusiasm of the masses. Over the long term, he thought, individuals were motivated by their beliefs, by the vision of a better world: they could not be convinced to struggle or sacrifice for socialism if it were presented merely as the historically necessary result of economic laws.

But Bernstein did not stop with his rejection of historical materialism. He went on to attack the second pillar, class struggle, which was as flawed as the belief in economic determinism: it was both historically inaccurate and politically debilitating. Bernstein argued that there was a natural community of interest between workers and the many other men and women who suffered from the injustices of the capitalist system. At the turn of the century, large numbers in the middle classes and peasantry were feeling economically threatened and politically frustrated. Bernstein saw them as potential recruits. He urged socialists to ground their appeals in "the feeling of common humanity" and a "recognition of social interdependence."

Although Bernstein's revisionism is the best known, he was hardly alone. All the features of his critique were brought forward in other West European countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result, socialist parties and the Second International were consumed by the "revisionist controversy." Although revisionists were pointedly rebuked at the International's Amsterdam convention in 1904, the movement continued to grow as the realities of European political and economic life made orthodox belief increasingly difficult. Thus social democracy—for that is what democratic revisionism would become—had its origin not in the *dilution* of orthodox Marxism but rather in the *abandonment* of its core principles. This rejection was as thorough as Marx's had been of the basic tenets of liberalism a half-century earlier, something revisionists themselves were not eager at the time to announce but which their opponents saw clearly. Rosa Luxemburg, for example—perhaps Bernstein's most vehement and insightful critic—summed up the heretical implications of his views when she noted that socialism was "scientific" rather than "utopian" because economic developments were leading inevitably to capitalism's collapse. If, however, "one admits with Bernstein that capitalist development does not move in the direction of its own ruin, then socialism ceases to be an objective necessity and instead becomes a 'mere ideal.'" She was, of course, absolutely right, although it would take another generation of war and depression for the fundamentally new political movement based on revisionism to come into its own.

From Revisionism to Social Democracy

In the years leading up to the First World War, the revisionists' rejection of both historical materialism and class struggle intensified, and the gulf between them and their orthodox colleagues deepened. The final break came in the 1920s and 1930s as European socialists, now often the dominant parties in their national political systems, confronted the challenges of a socio-economic landscape transformed by the First World War.

Populist movements on the right were starting to chip away at the support of traditional liberal and conservative parties. Right-wing pro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tests against capitalism's atomization, amorality, and materialism had been growing since the end of the nineteenth century, but the war gave them a mass base. Concerned about the power and appeal of the right, many revisionists argued that clinging to the orthodox Marxist program would doom the democratic left to oblivion. They proposed instead a program that would tap into the needs of the mass of disoriented and discontented Europeans. To develop such a program they returned to the revisionist themes of a generation before: the primacy of politics, the importance of morality, and the value of cross-class cooperation.

In the context of the interwar years and the Great Depression, this meant first and foremost using political forces to control economic ones. Where orthodox Marxists and classical liberals preached passivity in the face of economic catastrophe, the new, truly "social democratic" leftists fought for programs that would use the power of the state to tame the capitalist system. They argued that the market's anarchic and destructive powers could be fettered at the same time that its ability to produce unprecedented material bounty was exploited. They thus came to champion a real "third way" between laissez-faire liberalism and soviet communism based on a belief that political forces must be able to triumph over economic ones. These themes were defended within all socialist parties: in Belgium, Holland, and France, Hendrik de Man and his *Plan du Travail* found energetic champions. De Man argued for an activist depression-fighting strategy, an evolutionary transformation of capitalism, and a focus on the control rather than the ownership of capital. Activists in other parts of Europe echoed the argument. In Germany and Austria, reformers advocated government intervention in the economy and proto-Keynesian stimulation programs; and in Sweden, the Social Democratic Party (SAP) initiated the single most ambitious attempt to reshape capitalism from within.

REGARDLESS of the specific policies they advocated, one thing that joined all budding interwar social democrats was a rejection of the passivity and economic determinism of orthodox Marxism and a belief in the need to use state power to tame capitalism. In order to do this, however—and finally relegate historical materialism to the dustbin of history—they had to win majority support for their programs. Hence, during the interwar years many returned to the theme of cross-class cooperation. In an era of dislocation and disorientation, these social democrats realized that appeals to the "people," the "community," and the common good were much more attractive than the class struggle of orthodox Marxism or the individualism of classical liberals, and so they often embraced a communitarian, corporatist, and even nationalist approach.

Once again, de Man was a key figure. He argued that especially since the war, a natural community of interest had arisen between workers and other social groups, and his *Plan* was therefore explicitly designed to appeal to "all classes of the population suffering from the present economic distress and to all men of good will." He also urged socialists to recognize that attracting the masses would require providing them with a new "faith" that the determinism and economism of orthodoxy could no longer provide. Activists across the continent adopted his themes, but it was only in Scandinavia, and in Sweden in particular, that this new approach was embraced wholeheartedly by a unified party. That is why one must turn to the Swedish case to observe the full dimensions, and potential, of the social democratic experiment.

During the interwar years, the Swedish SAP developed a comprehensive economic program designed to harness the powers of the market and reshape the Swedish polity. In selling this program to the electorate, especially during the depression, the SAP stressed its activism and commitment to the common good. During the 1932 election campaign, for example, a leading party paper proclaimed, "Humanity carries its destiny in its own hands. Where the bourgeoisie preach laxity and submission to fate, we appeal to people's desire for creativity, conscious that we both can and will succeed in shaping a social system in which the fruits of labor will go to the benefit of those who are willing to participate in the common task." Similarly, one of the SAP's economic theorists, Ernst Wigforss, declared, "We social democrats cannot accept a system where during all times, even the best, up to 10 percent of the workers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must be unemployed and during worse times even more. We refuse to admit that this is necessary and natural despite how [many] people come armed with theories stating that this must be so." It is instructive to compare this view to contemporaneous statements made, for example, by Germany's Rudolf Hilferding, perhaps the most influential Marxist economic theorist of the interwar years, who argued that there was little socialists could do to alter the course of capitalism. With true self-knowledge he noted that orthodox Marxists were the last and best of the classical economists, since they put their faith in ineluctable economic mechanisms and doubted the efficacy of government intervention in the economy.

Meanwhile, the SAP's leader, Per Albin Hansson, was popularizing his theme of Sweden as the *folkhemmet* or "people's home." He declared that "the basis of the home is community and togetherness" and stressed that social democracy strove to "break down the barriers that separate citizens." The result was that while in countries such as Germany and Italy the populist right assumed the mantle of activism and communal solidarity, in Sweden it was the social democrats who became the champions of the "little people," "one with the nation." These positions not only helped the SAP to form a majority government through an alliance with the peasantry, but enabled it to reap political rewards from the eventual economic recovery.

By the mid-1930s, therefore, the democratic strand of revisionism had blossomed into a powerful and creative political movement all its own. In contrast to orthodox Marxism's passivity and classical liberalism's laissez-faire, social democracy argued for the primacy of politics and was willing to use the state to control, or at least direct, the market. In contrast to Marxism's focus on the proletariat and classical liberalism's focus on the individual, social democracy appealed to the ordinary or little people, the community, and the common good. The argument gave social democrats a rationale for using political power to control the development of capitalism, while the appeal embodied the norms of national solidarity and cooperation that lay at the heart of their worldview. By the end of the 1930s, all the components of what would come to be known as the postwar social democratic compromise had already been developed, although it was only in Sweden that they were fully implemented. The irony of the postwar era would be that just as these policies came to be widely accepted, many social democrats forgot why they had championed them in the first place.

Triumph and Amnesia

By the end of the Second World War, the practical policies favored by social democrats were so clearly seen as the most sensible way to tame the vicious aspects of free-market capitalism that they were adopted by a wide range of political parties. Indeed, the transformation of the West European political landscape after 1945 was nothing less than amazing, as parties advocating either classical liberal, orthodox Marxist, or old-style conservative politics practically disappeared from the scene. This convergence around the social democratic program created dangers for the movement because it removed the key source of its distinctive appeal. Mainstream acceptance of many social democratic ideas could not help but breed a certain complacency on the part of movement theorists and activists. Assimilation, as every minority group knows, is a double-edged sword.

This intellectual *embourgeoisement* was accompanied by a social and professional one as well, as generational change took its toll on the movement's leadership and collective memory. By the start of the postwar era, many of the pioneering activists and intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s had either died or emigrated. This loss was deepened by the fact that as social democrats were becoming government officials and managers of capitalism, they naturally looked for technocrats rather than intellectuals and activists as party leaders—people comfortable with, and good at, the ordinary politics of ordinary times. These new leaders presided over unprecedented power and political success, but they lacked the old-timers' hunger and creative spark. Triumph, in short, bred smugness and intellectual stagnation, and the result was a movement that lost touch with its original intellectual and political rationale.

The story of social democracy in the 1950s and 1960s is that of a movement undermined

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by its own success. Everything seemed fine on the surface, but beneath it the intellectual and theoretical foundations erected by Bernstein, de Man, and other revisionist and social democratic thinkers were being eroded through ignorance and neglect. In the mid-1970s, new economic problems developed across the industrialized world and Western Europe in particular, and many of the specific policies associated with social democracy came under attack. Yet because the movement had forgotten that these policies, although crucial achievements, were only means to larger ends, social democrats often clung to them tenaciously and lost ground to neoliberal forces offering bolder, more innovative responses to the crisis. Today in Europe social democrats are electorally successful but, for the most part, lack distinctive solutions to contemporary problems; largely as a result, they have lost the ability to generate enthusiasm among European publics.

The irony here is that the contemporary period resembles in important ways the one in which the movement emerged a century ago. Then as now, economic globalization was bringing the world together and generating both unprecedented prosperity and social discontent. Then as now, the political environment was dominated by a belief in the primacy of economics and unfettered markets and yet marked by a longing for some type of social control and communal solidarity. If what remains of the social democratic movement cannot return to first principles and convince European publics that they can respond creatively to this longing, we should not be surprised to find that other, less savory movements—of the Jörg Haider/Jean Le Pen variety—arise to fill this crucial role.

Applying the Lessons of the Past

A re-examination of social democracy's past is a necessary prelude to discussion of its future. Traditional social democratic principles can form the basis of a distinctive and attractive program today, but only if we remember two points.

First, in order to be truly social democratic, a contemporary political program must be committed to the primacy of politics. This means that social democrats today, as in the past, must recognize both the dynamism *and* the destructive potential of capitalism. They must join a dedication to economic growth and prosperity to an unwillingness to leave the life chances of individuals to the mercy of the market. They must aim, in other words, to reconcile their commitment to a market economy with their rejection of a market society. Many West European governments were able to achieve this reconciliation during the postwar era through a combination of traditional welfare state policies and active (Keynesian) management of national economies. Some of these policies have declined in efficacy over time, but this is no reason for the goal to be abandoned. Scholars such as Gosta Esping-Andersen and James Galbraith have convincingly argued that a certain type of decommodifying welfare state is entirely compatible with twenty-first century capitalism, and the recent record of countries like Sweden and the Netherlands shows that generous welfare programs and a dynamic economy can easily go together. The key is designing policies that encourage flexibility and openness while protecting citizens from the dislocations that a rapidly changing economy can bring.

The second component of a truly social democratic program must be communal and social solidarity. The history of social democracy is marked by the desire to find an alternative to the individualism of classical liberalism and the class struggle of orthodox Marxism. Relatively homogenous societies and independent states made an emphasis on solidarity unproblematic during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, but now, thanks to immigration and interdependence, such appeals are difficult to sustain (at least for those unwilling to flirt with chauvinism and xenophobia). Nevertheless, social democrats must find some way to refashion communitarian appeals in order to address the dislocations of the contemporary era and generate a broad popular base for the welfare state and activist government. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers suggest a reorientation from politics at the national to the local level because they believe that today it is only within smaller groups that the sense of common concern and purpose necessary for progressive politics can be maintained. Whether

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one agrees or not, it is clear that as in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social democrats need to recapture the theme of communal solidarity from the populist right.

Keeping these two criteria in mind allows us to understand why the much ballyhooed "third way" promoted by Tony Blair, Anthony Giddens, and others is less a continuation of social democracy than a radical break with it. Supporters of the "third way" want to retain some of the movement's communitarian aspects while rejecting the idea that market forces need to be, and can be, redirected or even overruled in the service of fundamental social goals. But historically, social democrats accepted or tolerated the market only because of its ability to provide the material basis upon which the good life can be built, and remained unwilling to recognize its primacy in social life. They agreed with Karl Polanyi's argument in *The Great Transformation* that although capitalism had unleashed hitherto unimagined productive powers, some sort of shelter had to be erected so that societies and individuals could weather the gales of economic, social, and political change. Today the gales are blowing again, and shelters are needed. What's missing is a blueprint, a movement, and leaders who know what they are about. ●

SHERI BERMAN is an assistant professor of politics at Princeton University and the author of *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe*. She is working on a book entitled *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Ideological Dynamics of the Twentieth Century*.

TOP SECRET

The government says Wen Ho Lee may have planned to give U.S. nuclear weapon secrets to . . . Switzerland? Yes, really, Switzerland (*Albuquerque Journal*, March 9).

•

The U.S. intelligence community reports that Chinese spies are everywhere in America, lurking in "low-key" locales like public libraries (*Washington Times*, March 9).

•

After news of the Wen Ho Lee case broke, Los Alamos removed a copy of the periodic table of elements from its web site, lest some enemy "steal" that peculiarly American "secret" too.

To learn how a helpless little government like that of the United States of America protects itself from enemies, both foreign and domestic, who try to ferret out its deepest, darkest secrets, start your subscription with the November/December 2000 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*—it's going to be a very special issue.

To subscribe, visit our website, www.thebulletin.org; call our Circulation Manager, Kattia Cuba, at 773-702-2555; or fax your request to 773-702-0725.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

50 Ways to Say You're Fired

Working in Italy and the U.S.A.

Joanne Barkan

NOTHING CHARACTERIZES the private-sector labor market in the United States more clearly than the ability to fire employees at will. "Sorry, you're no longer needed here" sounds like the refrain of a classic American song. Those Europeans who oppose the job protections typical of post–World War II social democracy admire the "American model." They see easy firing as part of "labor market flexibility" and the best answer to their economic problems. If only their businesses could operate in a deregulated labor market . . . if only they could get rid of excess workers, troublesome workers, mediocre workers, then certainly all good things would follow: employees would work harder, companies would hire more readily, productivity would rise, structural unemployment would shrink, and Europe would compete as successfully as the United States in the global market.

In Italy today, the call for labor market flexibility sounds like the repetition of a sacred mantra. Not surprisingly, employers of every kind, business leaders, and center-right politicians want to deregulate. Yet even some parties in the center-left coalition and some left economists and sociologists now support greater flexibility. They all see the labor unions as their main opponents, as the foot-dragging adversaries of "modernization."

This assault on basic job protections (won in Italy only thirty years ago) erodes the social democratic model just as much as, perhaps more than, cutbacks in welfare state benefits. To understand exactly what's going on, one needs a clear image of how people find and keep jobs in Italy and how this contrasts with the American model. Here are six snapshots—taken recently in Italy and the United States—of workers, bosses, and trade unionists.

The New York Temp

Sally Reid, twenty-four years old, works full time at a publishing house in Manhattan. She is the administrative assistant to two high-level editors who couldn't get along without her. At night, she takes classes at a local university where she's trying to earn a bachelor's degree in English literature. She found her job through a private employment agency, and the publishing house hired her as a "temp"—a worker hired *in theory* on a temporary basis. Because no legal time limits exist for this kind of work, a temp job can last one day or twenty years. Reid has been working at the publishing house for four years.

The employment agency that placed Reid still takes a percentage of her pay check and will do so for as long as she works at the publishing house. She has no health insurance, no accident insurance, no retirement plan aside from Social Security. She gets no paid sick days, no paid legal holidays, and no vacation unless her employer agrees to let her take unpaid time off. She keeps her job by working hard, making no demands, and not complaining. She doesn't look for another job because she doesn't expect to find anything better at her level. In short, Reid has become a "permatemp."

A decade or so ago, most private companies hired administrative assistants as "regular" employees, not as temps. Companies could fire them just as easily because so few belonged to unions. Yet employers had to pay Social Security taxes for regular workers and provide them

Thanks to the Bogliasco Foundation/Liguria Center for the Arts and Humanities where I was a resident fellow in spring 2000 and worked on this article. An earlier version appeared in Italian in *Reset* magazine. Four of the names used in the text (Sally Reid, Alison Mann, Marcella Forti, and Nadia Forti) are not the real names of the persons described.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with health insurance *if* the company had a health plan. To avoid paying for any benefits, employers began hiring temps and keeping them on permanently without an iota of security.

Permatemps have had only one recourse: to sue the companies where they work, using the "common law employee test." By demonstrating that the companies control their work, have the power to fire them, and therefore are true employers, permatemps can sometimes win regular benefits. To stop the suits, employers lobbied Congress for legislation called the Staffing Firm Worker Benefits Act of 1997 (H.R. 1891). This law would allow companies to designate up to 100 percent of a workforce as permanent employees of the employment agencies that originally placed them. The agencies would have no obligation to offer any benefits to "their" workers. The AFL-CIO opposes the bill, which remains in committee.

The Dean's Administrative Assistant

Alison Mann, too, works as an administrative assistant. But her workplace—a dean's office in a private East Coast university—is one of the 10 percent that is unionized in the private sector. As long as the same job exists and Mann performs it well, the university can't fire her without battling the union. If Mann and her boss disagree about her performance, the university must negotiate the matter with the local union's representative. If the union and employer have a good working relationship, they can usually find a solution (adjusting the workload, setting up a probation period, transferring Mann to another department, and so on).

Mann's contract—negotiated by the union—requires the university to pay her Social Security taxes and health insurance premiums. She has two weeks of paid vacation and several days of paid sick leave. Mann's contract also creates opportunities for her to increase her skills and move up within the workplace. She can take courses at the university. If a job at the next level becomes available and if she is fully qualified for it, the university must offer her the job before offering it to someone from the "outside." If Mann's bosses don't believe she's right for the new job, they must negotiate with the union.

From the point of view of a university dean who wants to get rid of an employee as easily and quickly as possible, the union represents a time-consuming bother. From Mann's point of view, the union provides the only possible protection in the American market system.

The Venetian Hotelier

Marcella Forti joined the Italian Communist Party when she was in high school. She remained active for many years and still considers herself a leftist. After working as a teacher in Venice and then in city government, she bought a small hotel and restaurant and has been running them successfully for fifteen years. On May 21, 2000, she voted "yes" in a national referendum to abolish one provision of the 1970 Workers' Rights Statute (*Statuto dei diritti dei lavoratori*). The provision allows a judge to order an employer to rehire a worker who was unjustly fired. The referendum was immediately nullified because too few voters (only 32 percent of the electorate) went to the polls. Yet unlike Forti, 66 percent of those who did vote chose *not* to change the law.

Forti argues that she should be able to choose whom she wants to work in her hotel and restaurant and, if a relationship sours, fire any employee. She doesn't object to paying severance wages, and she tries to create a pleasant workplace. Yet she doesn't want to spend money on lawyers or submit to the possible whims or prejudices of a judge. She also opposes the law that requires employers to interview and possibly hire people from the government job placement lists. From her point of view, the labor situation in Italy is completely frozen. "That's why I won't hire more employees," she claims.

Forti's daughter, Nadia Forti, recently graduated from law school and is looking for a full-time job. She voted "no" on the referendum and disagrees with her mother's arguments. From Nadia Forti's point of view, Italian employers can always fire workers who don't perform their jobs well. But they shouldn't be able to fire someone simply because they don't like that person. "What's to stop employers from firing someone whose skin color or gender they don't like?" she asks. Nadia Forti points out that her mother—like almost all small-business owners in Italy—has always hired exactly whom

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she wanted and has never hired anyone from an official job placement list. Nadia Forti herself has been on the lists since she was fourteen years old and has never received a call about a job.

At one level, the discussion of the referendum with Marcella Forti remained completely hypothetical. She employs fewer than fifteen people, so the Workers' Statute does not even apply to her business. As for not hiring more staff, she needs a certain number of employees to run the business. If a waiter or receptionist quits, she has to replace that person. At a more general level, her position demonstrates the pervasiveness of the debate on worker and employer rights in Italy and its significance for the left.

Until recently, the left quite uniformly considered the Workers' Statute to be the most important and enduring victory of the massive, militant labor struggles of the 1960s. It covers approximately 65 percent of all employees (*lavoratori dipendenti*). The statute implemented the rights to organize unions and to bargain collectively that the 1948 Italian Constitution had guaranteed in principle. The law also gave unions the right to take employers to court for unfair labor practices. Today, some Italian fans of Tony Blair-type center-left politics argue that parts of the Workers' Statute, like the labor unions, are dragging down the economy. They also argue that the statute and the unions defend the interests of only a "privileged" sector of the workforce—workers with permanent, full-time jobs—to the detriment of everyone else, especially young people looking for work.

The Refrigerator Factory Worker in Turin

Dario Anchisi is twenty-six years old and studies business at the University of Turin. Since February 2000, he has worked full time at a factory (owned by a multinational corporation) that produces parts for refrigerators. The company hired him on a training contract (*contratto di formazione*)—a type of labor contract designed by Parliament to create jobs for young people trying to enter the labor market. By law, the company can pay Anchisi less money for performing the same job as a regular worker. The contract lasts for six months. The company can renew it twice; then it must either hire him with a regular contract or dismiss him.

Anchisi works a different shift every week, but the job itself is not difficult. He operates a computerized machine that fuses an aluminum coating onto a steel part. After programming the machine, he can leave it and do what he likes for about ten minutes; then he reprograms the machine. The middle-aged worker next to him does the same job manually, which requires physical strength and effort. "His arms and hands," Anchisi said, "are three times as big as mine. He works in a sleeveless T-shirt in winter. I wear a sweater to keep warm."

It took Anchisi less than an hour to learn how to use the computerized machine, which raises two points: First, although the new technology has greatly reduced the physical difficulty of the task and potential harm to the worker, it hasn't raised the skill level or interest of the job much. Second, the company could obviously teach its older workers how to use the new machines but doesn't.

Anchisi's father worked for many years as the Communist Party functionary in one of the Fiat factory towns near Turin. Anchisi votes for the Left Democrats, but despite pride in his father's history, he has never joined the union at his workplace. It seems irrelevant to him. "The union helps current workers with their tax forms and retired workers with their pensions, but it has no other presence in the factory," he said. "The union negotiates the metalworkers' contract, but that's very remote from us." And yet the ignorance of other young workers about labor unions seems to appall Anchisi. He described an orientation meeting for new workers at the factory. "One of them started yelling at the union representative for laying him off earlier. He didn't even understand the difference between the union and management."

Although Anchisi has no desire to work permanently in a factory, most young people who take these jobs do. After Fiat began hiring again in 1997 (the company's hiring freeze in Turin had lasted eight years), the metalworkers' union (Fiom) did a survey of young workers at Fiat's Mirafiori plant. Almost 90 percent of those polled were twenty-five years old or younger. Exactly 90 percent hoped to stay at Fiat on a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

permanent basis. Yet, according to Anchisi, most young people never get permanent jobs. After eighteen months on training contracts, companies let the workers go and hire new ones on the same temporary, low-wage basis.

Two Italian Labor Unionists

Ornella Banti runs the Turin branch of a union project called New Labor Identities (*Nuove identità di lavoro* or Nidil). The parent organization is the largest, most left-leaning of Italy's three national union confederations—the *Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro* (Cgil). Operating since February 1999, Nidil offers services and legal advice to people working under "atypical contracts"—contracts for temporary and part-time jobs.

Until recently, most such jobs were illegal in Italy. They existed, of course, but in the underground economy. Employers who wanted to hire workers legally offered full-time, permanent jobs automatically covered by national union contracts. In 1997, the center-left government of Romano Prodi designed legislation creating the new atypical contracts as part of an effort to liberalize the labor market. Parliament passed the law, and the effect on the Italian economy has been striking. According to the most recent annual report of Istat (Italy's bureau of statistics), 57.7 percent of new jobs created in 1999 fall into the atypical category. More than 1.8 million Italians now work at legally sanctioned, temporary jobs in the industrial and service sectors. Faced with this rapid expansion, the two other national labor confederations also set up projects like Nidil.

One new type of contract—designed for interim work (*lavoro interinale*)—has attracted particular attention. Companies can now "rent work" from private employment agencies (practically nonexistent in Italy before 1997) that select and send out personnel. If a company doesn't like the person who arrives, it can ask the agency for someone else because the company is renting work and not a particular worker. By law, this rented work actually costs more than a permanent worker, but companies gladly pay the higher price. They are buying the power to fire employees at will. Interim work has grown so quickly in northern and central Italy that twenty-four different agencies (including the multinational Manpower) now run fifty-four offices just in Turin, a city of eight hundred thousand inhabitants. In the South, the rampant underground economy has limited the spread of legal interim work.

The private employment agencies select people whom they think will work diligently, be compliant, and not turn into union militants. "People doing *lavoro interinale* work so hard that they create resentment on the part of the permanent workers," Ornella Banti said. "The permanent workers see the new ones as a threat." Banti's description of the constant fear of being fired recalled both the repressive working conditions at Fiat in the 1950s and 1960s and the working lives of most Americans. According to the 1997 Italian law, however, anyone doing *lavoro interinale* at the same company for twenty-four months must be offered a permanent job. This minimal but fundamental protection doesn't yet exist in the United States.

Making contact with "atypical workers" is a slow and difficult process for Nidil, which depends on the cooperation of the local unions. Banti relies on union representatives to introduce her to the new workers during their lunch hours and breaks. She talks to them one by one and finds out what they need: information on their rights, legal advice, access to credit, and so on. In the first fourteen months, Nidil made contact with four thousand workers in Turin. For practically all of them, their first direct association with a labor union has come through Nidil.

Although only about one hundred workers have joined the Cgil through Nidil, Banti doesn't believe membership can be her first goal. Temporary workers can't predict how long they will be able to stay at a job; they know that many employers don't want union members. So they have little incentive to join. From Banti's point of view, Nidil's initial goals should be to provide services for these workers, defend them, and draw them into the union's orbit.

Retired workers now make up 50 percent of total union membership in Italy, and overall, membership figures are stagnating. Since so-called atypical jobs are the fastest growing part of the job market, it certainly seems that the future of the Italian labor movement de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pends in large measure on successfully integrating these new kinds of workers. So I was surprised to hear a negative reaction to Nidil from Alessandra Mecozzi, a longtime union official with the Fiom, historically considered Italy's most militant and radical industrial union. Mecozzi worked in Turin for many years and now heads up the Fiom's international office in Rome.

When I mentioned Nidil, Mecozzi immediately shook her head and said, "I'm not convinced. It doesn't give workers what they really want, which is a permanent job. And it doesn't do what a union must do—organize workers at their workplace. You can't be a union for workers who change jobs all the time and always work for different companies."

I mentioned counter-examples in the United States to Mecozzi, including my own union—the National Writers Union. The NWU has organized 5,500 freelance writers, scattered all over the United States, into a single local of the United Automobile Workers Union (UAW Local 1981/ AFL-CIO). Although the NWU has succeeded in signing contracts with only a few publications, it provides necessary services, information, and benefits (for example, a group health insurance plan) to otherwise completely unprotected writers. And 5,500 more Americans have joined the labor movement. Mecozzi liked hearing that American writers can end up as *metalmeccanici*. As for Nidil, she agreed that the organization could be useful if it gave workers their first contact with a union.

Mecozzi believes Italian unions are doing the "least bad" job possible of defending Italian workers during the current neoliberal assault, but this is an inadequate strategy for her. "It's impossible just to defend what you have," she said. "You'll just keep losing it bit by bit." More sweepingly, she criticizes the once radical labor movement for having lost its vision of an alternative society—one not centered on private companies and money-making. In the short term, she believes the unions have failed to propose their own convincing reform programs (for example, a much needed pension reform). Instead, the unions are increasingly isolated as some leftists adopt the center-right's line that unionized workers are overly entitled members of society. "Having a permanent job has become something to be ashamed of," Mecozzi says.

Mecozzi's skepticism about Nidil wouldn't surprise Ornella Banti. She has encountered wariness in the Cgil and indifference since the project was founded. The confederation hasn't put a great deal of money into Nidil, and yet Banti believes the Cgil leadership is committed to defending the rights of atypical workers—one way or another. "It might be with or without Nidil," she said. "They're still trying to find the best way to do it."

Photo Captions

I want to complete this collection of images from Italy and the United States with a few brief thoughts—photo captions of a sort. First, the "new economy" may have superseded Fordism (an economy based on mass industrial production that takes place in large plants), but Taylorism (production broken up into small, repetitive tasks) certainly persists. Just because a job involves a computer doesn't mean that it is high skill, interesting, or well paid.

Second, Europeans who work in the United States for a while often remark that we work harder here. We probably do. We grow up knowing that it's easy to lose a job and possible to land in the gutter. No one anywhere should accept this model uncritically or imitate it wholly.

Finally, labor unions today—in Italy or the United States—are not an obstacle to progress and prosperity. Yes, some need new strategies that go beyond trying to defend what already exists. Others need a profound shake-up (as did the AFL-CIO before John Sweeney took charge). And unions in all post-Fordist economies must find ways to organize an increasingly disaggregated labor force. Yet given the evisceration of left political parties, labor unions today offer ordinary citizens their best chance to counterbalance the immense power of market forces. ●

JOANNE BARKAN, author of *Visions of Emancipation: The Italian Labor Movement Since 1945*, is senior writer at the *Forward*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Common Enemy: Students Fight Private Prisons

Liza Featherstone

JUST ABOUT every aspect of collegiate life can be leased for corporate profit these days. Increasingly, universities subcontract to large companies services they used to provide themselves; on campuses nationwide, corporate logos are becoming as ubiquitous as backpacks, as Barnes & Noble takes over the student bookstore, and McDonald's and Starbucks set up shop in the student commons. It is becoming more and more usual for behemoth management companies to run universities' janitorial, laundry, and dining hall services.

These practices have, at many schools, met with passionate student resistance; at Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, SUNY-Albany, and elsewhere, students staged sit-ins this spring to urge their university administrations to stop tolerating contractors' exploitation of workers on campus. Students objected to illegal union-busting practices and the failure to pay workers a living wage, among other abuses. And students at many more schools occupied buildings—some even went on hunger strikes—to protest egregious conditions in factories that make hats and sweatshirts bearing their school logos. University administrators that do business with Sodexho-Marriott—the largest campus dining hall management company in the world—are beginning to face student objections to yet another ugly kind of corporate profiteering—private prisons.

Sodexho-Marriott's parent company, the Paris-based Sodexho Alliance, is, with a 17 percent share in the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), the largest investor in the U.S. private prison industry. Prisoners housed in private facilities make up the fastest growing segment of the U.S. prison and jail population; that makes private prisons a logical target for activists who object to the current incarceration mania. (Although violent crime in the United States has been steadily declining since 1994, the incarceration rate has skyrocketed. With two million people behind bars, the United States is second only to Russia in its incarceration rate.) And many do. Students in New York and California have for several years been protesting what they see as public spending on prisons at the expense of higher education—as if the state, rather than investing in their generation's future, is investing against it.

But there are other reasons to oppose private prisons. Though of course those objecting to the prison boom don't like public prisons either, student activists find it particularly disturbing that corporations should be making a profit from policies that are not in the public interest—such as excessive prison sentences and the incarceration of nonviolent offenders. Furthermore, though they are relatively new, Wackenhut and CCA, the two largest management companies, already have a bad track record: they skimp on safety, guard salaries, and education programs. Such "economies" may save the company money, but they result in institutions that violate human rights and endanger public safety. In the correctional system, says Kevin Pranis of the New York City-based Prison Moratorium Project, a coalition of student, youth, and other activists, "there is no fat. Private prisons can't make money and still provide decent services." Still other opponents of private prisons, most prominently the corrections guards unions, see nothing wrong with prison expansion but believe that prisons should be a public responsibility and should be publicly accountable.

Unlike many institutional symptoms of over-indulged global capital, private prisons are politically vulnerable. Private prison companies' performance on Wall Street has been dismal, and despite the demand, profits seem elusive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stories of riots and abuses in private prisons are rampant and have damaged their public image. Prison guards unions' opposition and public safety concerns have jeopardized their support even among many rabid law-and-order politicians. Though their numbers are growing, private prisons haven't exactly taken over the corrections system: only 7 percent of prisons and jails are privately run. Coordinated and well-articulated protests from idealistic students could deal the industry another substantial blow.

"Not With Our Money," the student campaign against Sodexho-Marriott, was conceived and launched by the Prison Moratorium Project. The campaign has been able to make common cause with student labor solidarity groups because Sodexho-Marriott has a grim history of union-busting and labor law violations. In March, for instance, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) against the company for illegal rules in its employee handbook restricting workers' right to speak to people outside the company about their working conditions and to meet one another in public spaces. To avoid NLRB prosecution for these blatant illegalities, Sodexho-Marriott settled with HERE, agreeing to strike the offending rules from its handbook and notify each employee in writing that this change had been made. However, according to HERE organizer Marty Leary, the union's research suggests that the company has not complied with this settlement, and at this writing, another NLRB complaint was pending. HERE has active campaigns underway at Sodexho-Marriott-managed dining halls on a few campuses, in which students are actively involved.

At Earlham, a small Quaker college in Richmond, Indiana, students have been fighting for better wages for dining hall staff, who are Sodexho-Marriott employees. So when the Prison Moratorium Project kicked off the "Not With Our Money" Campaign in April, the Earlham students got on board immediately. Boycotting the dining hall for a day, the activists held a pizza party outside. (Food is crucial to this campaign; at St. Louis University, where the student government endorsed the dining hall boycott, activists provided no festive food alternative, and the campaign went nowhere. Hampshire and SUNY-Binghamton students, on the other hand, served potluck and now have promising campaigns underway. Without food, says Pranis, the boycott is "just starvation"—not politically hospitable.) They handed out fliers explaining Sodexho's role in the private prison industry. Five hundred students—of Earlham's 1,150—signed a petition asking Earlham to boot the company off campus. Only 130 students ate in the dining hall that day. Earlham's administration, as administrations tend to do when they don't wish to meet activists' demands, appointed a committee to review the matter. That committee, made up of both student and faculty representatives, advised canceling Sodexho-Marriott's contract if the company did not divest 50 percent of its CCA shares by April 2001 and the other half within the following year. College president Douglas Bennett ignored the committee's recommendation, but agreed to extend Sodexho-Marriott's contract by only one year (it is normally a five-year contract). Student pressure to raise wages did result in a 10 percent wage increase for campus workers. That was clearly a union-busting tactic, but it may not work: workers have begun discussing a union drive with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

DESPITE THE advances they made, students are angry at the administration; they feel that by creating a sham committee, the university showed little regard for the concept of "campus democracy." This is an increasingly common rallying cry on campuses; student activists believe that, as they are an integral part of the university community, they should have some influence over university policy. Structural complaints vary—from the powerlessness of the committees on which students and faculty serve to the impossibility of getting a meeting with the college president—but indignation over students' lack of power is pervasive.

Students also say that the school acted according to values that are at odds with its professed mission—as a liberal arts college and as a Quaker institution. "If we had been smart," says Esly Caldwell III, a recent Earlham gradu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ate who was active in the campaign last year, "we wouldn't even have mentioned private prisons. If we had just said the food was bad—which it is—Sodexho would be gone. But because we were doing what Earlham students are supposed to do and looking at the larger social justice issues, they're still here. That's just devastating." Though such disappointment can be especially powerful at a religiously affiliated school, students at all sorts of institutions are being politicized by the sense that academia is supposed to provide a space in which humanistic values at least compete with the bottom line; many are shocked to find out that their administrators, many of whom now like to be called "CEOs," think like businesspeople. In many student labor solidarity campaigns, such disillusionment has resulted in increasingly militant tactics (and administrative concessions); students agree that sit-ins over Sodexho-Marriott are likely this year.

Caldwell might be right about the bad food complaint. At SUNY Albany this spring, when student labor and antiprison activists joined forces with students holding an antisweatshop sit-in in university president Karen Hitchcock's office (in which seventeen students were arrested and several were handled brutally by campus police), the coalition demanded Sodexho-Marriott's ouster. Students denounced the CCA holdings and pointed to the company's terrible campus labor record. The previous year, HERE had successfully organized SUNY dining hall workers. When Sodexho-Marriott took over operations of the campus dining services, the company refused to honor the union recognition clause in its contract. To make matters worse for Sodexho, an outbreak of *E. coli* in one SUNY-Albany dining hall had made some students sick. So when the administration, in the end, did kick Sodexho off-campus, no one was sure why; clearly the student protest had helped, but the literally stomach-turning cuisine shouldn't be underestimated.

Oberlin students, too, began a campaign last spring. Student dining hall workers had been trying to unionize for two years and had been campaigning to end the use of nonunionized, underpaid temp labor in the dining hall. A dining hall boycott in early May—accompanied by an outdoor protest picnic, attended by hundreds of students, and an eighteen-by-twenty-four-foot "Hell No Sodexho" banner dropped from the roof of the library—prompted Oberlin president Nancy Dye to agree to end the use of temporary labor. However, she refused to engage students on the private prisons issue.

Students at the University of California-Santa Cruz, University of Massachusetts-Boston, Evergreen, American, Howard, Skidmore, University of Maryland-College Park, James Madison, and St. Louis University continue organizing against Sodexho. In Canada, which is beginning to have its own public debate over private prisons, students at the University of Toronto, McGill, and Concordia have also joined the campaign.

The Sodexho campaign is based on numerous coalitions—some of them unusual. The Oberlin coalition included the group working on behalf of Mumia Abu-Jamal, Ruckus Society-trained kids who can be called upon for almost any anticorporate civil disobedience (they dropped the banner from the library), the student labor solidarity groups, and those working on behalf of prisoners. Some groups' participation in the coalition has been short-lived; for example, that of the Oberlin Coalition for Sustainable Agriculture, which objected to Sodexho-Marriott's use of genetically modified (and needless to say, nonorganic) food. The administration bought off the food activists with a promised allocation of several hundred pounds of organic yams per semester, so their future participation is uncertain.

But at Oberlin and elsewhere, other elements of the coalition may have more staying power. Activists opposing corporate wrongdoing—labor and environmental exploitation, for example—and those opposing state human rights abuses—students working to end the death penalty, the prison boom, or police brutality—are working closely together. The anarchist leanings of many of the young people protesting the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and World Bank make this coalition even more natural; so do the anticorporatists' constant—and often ugly—confrontations with the criminal justice system. Antisweatshop protesters at the Universities of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wisconsin, Iowa, and Kentucky were pepper-sprayed and brutally handled by police; while hundreds of people (including students) were arrested in Seattle; Washington, D.C.; in Windsor, Ontario, at the Organization of American States meeting; and in Philadelphia at the Republican National Convention. When Caldwell and fellow Earlham students went to Washington, D.C., for the April 16 protests, they were arrested and taken to a CCA prison. Such confrontations bring the connections close to home.

THE CAMPAIGN'S racial mix is also promising. Much of the student anticorporate movement has been criticized for being "too white." But the Sodexho campaign has sparked interest among African-American students, partly because they know the prison mania is targeted at them, or at people who look very much like them: one in three black men ages twenty to twenty-nine are in the custody of the criminal justice system. To many young African Americans, the concept of private companies profiting from prisoners evokes the convict leasing system of the Old South. According to Caldwell, the private prisons issue drew in far more black students than are usually attracted to activist efforts at Earlham, including "athletes' groups, and black student groups that are normally planning parties." This reflects shifts taking place in the student movement as a whole—as it begins to confront domestic as well as foreign injustice, it becomes more multiracial. At Johns Hopkins, the traditionally apolitical Black Student Union actively participated in a student labor solidarity activists' sit-in on behalf of university laundry workers. Elsewhere, white students are taking their cues from activists of color. In California, for instance, where youth of color, students, and nonstudents—in organizations like Third Eye Movement and Youth Force Coalition—have been organizing against prison-building mania in that state, student antisweatshop activists at Berkeley and San Francisco State have made common cause with them, defining prisons as sweatshops because of their use of sub-minimum wage inmate labor.

The campaign against Sodexho-Marriott has already achieved some concrete gains. And there's good reason to think the students have alarmed the company. Before the boycott, CCA founder Doctor "Doc" R. Crants served on Sodexho-Marriott's board of directors—in late April, a few weeks after the wave of anti-Sodexho actions on campuses, he resigned. After American University students staged a dining hall boycott and a series of anti-Sodexho guerrilla theater events, the company put up fliers on campus explaining that it wasn't really investing in private prisons. (Throughout the campaign, Sodexho-Marriott has insisted that it is being unfairly targeted, since it is its parent company, Sodexho Alliance, that invests in CCA, technically not Sodexho-Marriott.) In August, just as Evergreen College was about to sign a contract with Sodexho-Marriott, negotiations broke down in the face of a threatened boycott from students and faculty.

These are hopeful signs, but it's unclear what the anti-Sodexho campaign's future holds. In its promising but precarious coalitions, its efforts at racial and class solidarity, its problematic but practical focus on a single company, its need to reach beyond the campus, it is a kind of microcosm for the challenges facing the new student movement.

Part of the challenge is trying to transform a consumer boycott into an effective and meaningful political event. Given that universities act like corporations and shamefully exploit their workers—from dishwashers to English-composition instructors—they shouldn't be surprised when those workers organize unions. By the same token, when they treat students as anonymous consumers—rather than as members of a community who deserve a say in their policies—they can expect students to act like politicized consumer activists. The "Not With Our Money" campaign looks like a typical consumer boycott—indeed, its slogan could be easily cut and pasted onto any boycott campaign. The slogan locates the students' power in their ability to spend money. Students at Hampshire even use the lofty term "conscientious objectors" to describe those who abstain from the meal plan in protest of Sodexho-Marriott. That's a little unsettling; clearly corporate America has us exactly where it wants us when a decision not to consume something is on a par with not fighting a war. Furthermore, purchasing power

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is a limited kind of power, and boycotts often seem useless, in part because no matter how bad a company is, one can be reasonably sure that its competitors aren't much better. At Earlham, for instance, some administrators pointed out that Aramark, the company that would compete with Sodexho in the upcoming bid for the dining hall contract, serves food in private prisons. And workers throughout the industry are poorly paid.

There is also the danger that in focusing on one company's multiple evils, the specificity of the private prison issue will be overlooked; indeed, that has already happened at some schools. At SUNY-Albany, for instance, it's unlikely that the company will take its ouster as a sign that it should divest from CCA, because private prison investment ended up being only one complaint among many. More likely it will try to avoid serving noxious bacteria for lunch.

The other problem with boycott campaigns is, of course, the contingencies involved. If Sodexho-Marriott is kicked off a campus, those activists may no longer be involved in the fight against private prisons. Indeed, Kevin Pranis says that many student activists have wanted to join the fight against private prisons, but they had no way into the issue until the Prison Moratorium Project started to publicize Sodexho's relationship to CCA. This makes sense; students should undertake campaigns in which they have some power to affect change, and they have far more power to influence their university's practices than, for instance, to persuade a judge to grant Mumia Abu-Jamal a new trial. But this means that students are not always in control of their particular struggles. If they build a powerful enough movement—on a foundation of committed coalitions that understand what they are fighting for, beyond one corporate enemy's particular evils—this revolving door of anticorporate campaigns might work. That's a big job, and much depends on what happens on campus this year.

The strength of the "Not With Our Money" boycott strategy will depend on whether students can transcend it. Working with campus dining hall workers is a good start—it is by working with workers in the United States and the third world that students protesting sweatshop labor have begun to forge a solidarity that is far more inspiring—and effective—than merely voting with dollars. Pranis would also like to see the student campaign work with prison guards unions, which adamantly oppose private prisons (most private prisons are not unionized, and guard salaries tend to be much lower than in state prisons). Clearly, as Pranis points out, there would be political and cultural obstacles to such an alliance—guards tend to favor building more prisons, for instance, while most student radicals see private prisons as a disturbing symptom of the expansion of the prison industry—but he hopes they'll "at some point, like the loggers and environmentalists, realize the enemy is elsewhere." Pranis also points to the need to build relationships with prisoners and the low-income people whose friends and families are being jailed in such obscene numbers.

There is no way of gauging the campaign's potential impact on the private prison industry, but it's clear that it could profoundly shape the emerging anticorporate movement. Says Oberlin student campaign leader Ty Moore, "We're hoping for a quick victory. We're hoping to use gains at Oberlin as a lightning rod for campaigns across the country. Maybe Sodexho-Marriott will pull out [of CCA]." But the goals go beyond Sodexho itself, he says. "We hope to create a model of a campaign that connects a range of battles—criminal justice, labor, environmental—by fighting one common enemy."

Whatever happens, the campaign is one to watch closely. Esly Caldwell expects Sodexho-Marriott's relationship to private prisons to become a human rights issue on a par with apparel industry abuses. "It's going to be like the sweatshops. When people hear what's going on, it's really going to blow up." ●

LIZA FEATHERSTONE is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn, N.Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Information Society, the New Economy, and the Hype

James B. Rule

We live in bubble times. The stock market orbits at record highs, apparently bound only by the untested dynamics of the "new economy." Novel industries sprout like mushrooms, purveying goods and services that most people could hardly imagine a few years ago. Fortunes are made buying and selling companies whose profitability remains speculative. And it's not just money, it's also the texture of life that's changing around us. Most of us have grown accustomed to pursuing complex relationships—from paying our taxes to seeking medical advice—through the mediation of machines rather than living human beings. We often expect expert systems—that is, sophisticated computer applications—to know better than flesh-and-blood experts about such everyday matters as what flights to book, what medicines to take, what terms to accept for a loan. At the root of all these developments, we are authoritatively told, lies the "computer revolution." We stand warned. Having experienced such drastic change thus far, we don't want to underestimate what may come next.

The resulting frame of mind bears striking resemblance to that of the late 1960s. Then, as now, all sorts of old constraints and certainties were falling away—to be replaced by something that no one could quite identify, but which everyone was convinced would be vastly more exhilarating. Today, similar anything-goes perceptions have generated their own momentum of credulity. Instead of hippies and countercul-

With this article, *Dissent* begins a series on the politics of the new information order.

ture pundits, of course, we have twenty-something software magnates and gurus of the "information age." But the pervasive mindset echoes that of a generation back: if we've gone this far, who can say what familiar reality will next be upended?

Many of the prophecies that cluster under the "information age" umbrella are clearly ideological. By this I don't mean that they are inaccurate, but that they are put forward by people and groups with deep interests in their realization.

Some elements of some of the ideologies are not unattractive. Much of the original enthusiasm of information-society boosters, for example, focuses on visions of radical *disintermediation* of relations between ordinary citizens and their social worlds—vastly streamlined access to information essential to one's well-being. In this heady view, sophisticated uses of computing will ensure that one no longer need depend on local doctors or clinics for advice on how to take care of one's self; nor on local, state, or national officialdom for information on how government institutions are doing (or failing to do) their jobs; nor on companies with the largest advertising budgets for information on products and services. In its overtly libertarian versions, this thinking often comes with a tinge of disdain for all sorts of civic institutions. But the underlying notion of endlessly broadened choice, of information technology as a social equalizer, commands sympathetic attention.

Other manifestations of the ideology are more obviously shaped by the interests of established institutions—like the demands for compliance with the imperatives of the "information society," which we allegedly ignore at our peril. Thus, ordinary businesses sense themselves under pressure (from giants of the com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

puter industry) to keep acquiring and upgrading their computing capacities, so as to remain, and be seen to remain, "state of the art."

Educators face pressure from parents and government agencies to "get computers into the schools," often without much notion of what's supposed to happen once this is accomplished. Citizens are assured that computerized "town meetings" are superior to old-fashioned, face-to-face forums for registering opinion. Consumers are encouraged to believe that sales via the Internet will better serve all personal and social needs than those accomplished on Main Street. It doesn't take a sociologist to tell that such exhortations are anything but disinterested. In the information society as elsewhere, money talks, and the computer-industrial complex has ample scope for its eloquence.

Much of this ideological hype is so blatant that one is tempted simply to brush it aside. But that would be rash. Profound changes *are* afoot in the spreading wake of computerization; some familiar social realities will, indeed, never be the same. New ways of creating, transmitting, and accessing all sorts of information pervade the very protoplasm of our world—creating new relationships and institutions, deflating old ones, offering new opportunities and new threats. And for us on the left, all this poses big questions. Which elements of these widely touted, multifarious social changes should we take seriously, and which should we bracket as industry self-promotion? Which groups, which interests, stand to gain, and which will lose? Which values crucial to the left will be easier to protect, and which will be at risk?

OBVIOUSLY NO full answer to such questions is possible here. But consider just a few settings and issues emerging from the new information order that are bound to demand our attention.

Work, Productivity, Education The hype surrounding computing is nowhere more intense than in prophecies of its economic potential. For true believers, computing is the business equivalent of Viagra—or perhaps more precisely, it is a twenty-first-century snake oil, something to alleviate any obstacle to productivity. So broad are the alleged benefits that some observers now predict a long-lasting surge of economic growth, as computing gradually comes to be used for anything and everything. Comcomitant with these overweening expectations (and here's the catch) is often the insistence that we must all adapt, willy-nilly, to the demands of a computerized world. Workers unprepared for computerized work will have no one to blame but themselves if they find nothing to do; schools that fail to make computing central to their instruction might as well be training producers of buggy whips or carbon paper.

One trouble with all this is the extremely ambiguous evidence for the much-heralded productivity benefits of computing. Since the 1980s, many analysts have noted that areas of the economy that saw the greatest early investment in computing have in fact shown the *slowest* productivity growth. Since then, of course, growth has accelerated throughout the American economy—but it is by no means clear, except to those committed *a priori* to the proposition, that computing is responsible. As MIT economist Robert Solow noted, in an often-quoted epigram, "You can see the effects of computing everywhere but in the productivity statistics."

No one doubts that specific applications of computing to specific activities can be highly cost effective. It is hard to imagine, for example, a noncomputerized version of today's system for airline flight scheduling, reservations, and ticketing. But recognizing such advantages hardly warrants the conclusion that computing is bound to provide similar benefits wherever managers invest in it. Once computerization is heralded as a progressive step for any and all organizations, it becomes more difficult both for managers and anyone else to maintain healthy skepticism.

The resulting ubiquity of computing in economic life—and the conviction that the technology *deserves* to be ubiquitous—in turn creates further opportunities for hucksterism. In many school systems, for example, computerizing the classroom has become virtually a litmus test for educational seriousness. The lesson has not been lost on politicians, including presidential candidates. Both the major candidates have made computerization of public

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schools a theme of their campaigns. These noble aspirations must have pleased the deep-pocketed donors in the computer industry, whose interest in seeing government promote their products to the nation's children need hardly be emphasized.

But as many commentators have pointed out, the investments necessary to computerize instruction crowd out expenditures for teachers, buildings, and instructional materials. Many of us who teach American public school graduates believe that more information is not what our students most urgently need—in comparison, say, to improved analytical skills and practice in using them. Nonetheless, local boards of education charge ahead with computerization programs, often with only vague ideas of what educational aim they are to accomplish. Perhaps good things stand to emerge from the use of computers in the classroom, if only through a process of trial and error. But if computerized teaching should yield a bust like that produced by Skinnerian teaching machines in the 1960s, many educators will have egg on their faces.

Commerce and Community Perhaps the most conspicuous form of disintermediation afforded by cyberspace lies in retail sales. The new media offer access to vastly expanded arrays of consumer choice and dramatically more convenient ways of providing goods and services. With a bit of reflection, of course, limitations become apparent: one still wants to be able to squeeze the tomatoes before selecting them for a salad. But the range of consumer opportunities offered via the computerized media is impressive nonetheless. Wine tasting, for the foreseeable future, will continue to be practiced in person. But do-it-yourself sex therapy software has obvious appeal for patients who prefer not to explain embarrassing difficulties to third parties.

Hence the proliferation of "dot.coms," vying for the dollars of citizens intent on maximizing their consumption options without leaving home to exercise them. Many of these optimistic start-ups certainly have half-lives shorter than volatile nuclear elements. But some major innovations are bound to stick. For a host of products—from drugs to insurance policies to books—e-commerce offers decisive advantages. Here the strengths of disintermediation may—repeat, *may*—empower consumers, enabling them to make critical comparisons of price and other terms across many prospective vendors.

THE SUCCESS of Internet retailing could also undermine other values. Much is made these days of the decline of civil society. The fraying of community meeting places is often identified as a symptom of such trends, as "downtowns" wither in favor of megastores and suburban malls. Civic associations, from PTAs to bowling leagues, are said to be losing ground to television and other privatized pastimes. It is hard to shake the image of increasingly affluent American citizen-consumers leaving home only for work or privatized consumption errands—but not to meet their neighbors or attend local gatherings. Such patterns come at a real cost, from languishing community action to increasing dependence by electoral campaigns on the purchase of expensive television time.

Clearly, Internet retailing can only sharpen such trends—eliminating remaining forms of sociability involved in shopping. Thus one has to wonder about the wisdom of notions like permanently exempting Internet transactions from sales taxes—a step seen by many boosters as a fitting accolade for the benefits of the new technologies. Main Street—that cliché of local civic life in America—has certainly supported countless deplorable values. But at least communities with a physical focus oblige citizens to confront the realities of their neighbors' lives and concerns. Even this slender contact with one's community stands to be attenuated by a world of consumption via cyberspace.

Activism and Civil Society Of course, cyberspace does not *only* undermine affiliation. The new media also make it possible for civic-minded activists to find new allies, form new associations, chart strategies, and amass new information to support their efforts. If people are indeed decreasing their civic activity close to home, they are also exploiting new possibilities for solidarity with others via the Internet. In a provocative *Dissent* essay on environmental activism ("Environmental Activism and Global Civil Society," Summer 1994), Paul Wapner

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foresaw the rise of a new "global civil society." The striking success of nongovernmental organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, he held, suggests that national boundaries no longer form any definitive constraint to the coalescence of worldwide pressure groups. Had he written his article this year, Wapner would no doubt have pointed to the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization as another case in which new media of communication helped foster civic activism on a global scale. From all indications, these new possibilities for organization and information exchange are giving rise to new global *norms*—with auspicious portents for agitation on human rights, gender issues, and an array of other matters in addition to the environment.

But we should hardly neglect what we stand to lose if and when cyber-activism displaces old-fashioned civic association—the kind that involves sitting in meetings, struggling for consensus in committees, and schmoozing with allies and antagonists. In these latter, often tedious, pastimes, a certain kind of civic virtue is required—the virtue of staying tuned and staying involved, even when one wishes to be somewhere else. In cyberspace, after all, one can take leave of tedious communications with a mouse click. In "meatspace" (that is, the world of physical presence), it is harder to drop out. Conversations that appear unrewarding, intractable, or exasperating nevertheless have to be completed, somehow. Such frustrating realities are as essential a part of civic life as its loftier victories. One would hardly want to see them altogether short-circuited by computerized affiliation.

Hierarchy and Privacy Nowadays, all sorts of vital relations with large organizations are carried out via computer. From the Internal Revenue Service, to our credit card companies, to our medical care providers, we have come to expect interactions mediated by computer, for better and for worse. On the positive side, we expect exact reckonings of the histories of our dealings with such authoritative bodies, reckonings that would be difficult to maintain and supply except through reliance on the computer. Increasingly, publics also demand the same sort of exactitude in government monitoring of toxic waste sites, or safety records of cars and other products, or even in the performance of physicians and hospitals. Here, too, the computer record is apt to represent the authoritative focus of controversy and public debate.

It is good that institutional performances be held publicly accountable, and that detailed records exist to support such accountability. Citizens need due process when they feel aggrieved by the handling of their tax liabilities or their American Express accounts. Mobilized, activist citizens' groups, similarly, need the kind of detailed computerized data that large organizations can keep—and ought to be required to keep—on their own activities. In these respects, computing offers the possibility for strengthening the voice and position of individuals in relation to hierarchies.

On the downside, let's acknowledge that things do not always work this way. There is nothing in computer technology that compels organizations to explore its democratic potential. Much vital data held by public and private institutions remains locked away from public scrutiny, despite the fact that it would be technologically easy to make it available.

This dialectic between accessibility and appropriation of information takes on special urgency when it involves the privacy of personal data. It's well known that data on ordinary citizens are subject to monitoring and misuse by both government and private organizations. Data generated by everything from Web site visits to the filling of doctors' prescriptions to credit card transactions become grist for computerized trade and exchange. Results can range from junk phone calls at dinner to politically motivated tax audits. These problems are most acute in the United States. In contrast to the Euro-

A LEGACY OF IDEAS

A bequest of any size can be of lasting benefit to *Dissent* and help ensure that the ideas and beliefs you hold dear will continue to have a public forum. Our legal name is the Foundation for the Study of Independent Social Ideas.

For more specifics on this or other information on gift planning, feel free to phone or write *Dissent*, 310 Riverside Drive #1201, New York, N.Y. 10025 (212) 316-3120.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pean Union, Canada, and Australia, the United States alone lacks a national ombudsman and a comprehensive set of laws protecting personal information from commercial and governmental appropriation. The lesson here is clear: one can hardly blame technology for problems that need to be solved politically.

THE MYTHOLOGY surrounding "the computer revolution" seems to grow more intense all the time. Much of it, we can be sure, is either free-floating fantasy or blatant, self-serving hype. But not all of it. We have no choice but to try to separate the froth from forces and developments that are bound to matter.

Certainties on these issues are scarce, but I would commit myself to two of them. First, changes triggered by information technology—whatever they prove to be—will by no means supersede political realities. The rise of the "information society" will bring winners and losers; we can count on both threats to, and opportunities for, values cherished by the democratic left. Our job is to hone our sensitivities to what's at stake—and how the changing information environment is altering those stakes.

Second, technology is not destiny. The new technologies, if anything, widen the range of political options. Only active political decision making will determine whether they enhance or erode people's control over data about themselves, for example, or whether large institutions will grow more or less accountable to those whose lives they shape. Thus it is essential that those of us who care about these matters work to ensure that the "information society" remains politicized—in the best sense of being invested with public attention and concern. ●

JAMES B. RULE, a member of *Dissent*'s editorial board, writes extensively on technological issues.

***Radical Philosophy Review*- A Journal for Progressive Thought**
Edited by Lewis R. Gordon, Brown University

Radical Philosophy Review is a nonsectarian journal of ideas with a focus on progressive thought. Articles, interviews and reviews aim to articulate and clarify central concepts of the left, providing a forum for the exchange of ideas among activist scholars, community activists and progressive artists.

Each issue features a dialog on a chosen topic, a forum of articles on the same subject, and a section on how the topic is connected to various indigenous struggles. The journal also covers news and events.
Two issues per volume • Institutions: $76 • Individuals: $35

Critical Sociology
Edited by David Fasenfest, Wayne State University

Critical Sociology grew out of the tumultuous late 1960s and was a by product of the "Sociology Liberation Movement," which erupted at the 1969 meetings of the American Sociological Association.

Publishing work mainly within the broadest boundaries of the Marxist tradition, it is also home to postmodern, feminist, and other radical arguments. *Critical Sociology* has gained a position as one of a select few "alternative" social science journals with widespread recognition and respect in the world of "mainstream" social science.
Three issues per volume • Institutions: $76 • Individuals: $37

First time subscribers receive a 25% discount off a one year subscription and 40% off a two year subscription.

***Call Toll Free!* 877-999-7575**

HUMANITIES PRESS, INC.
112 Water Street • Suite 400 • Boston • Massachusetts • 02109 • USA
Phone: 617-742-5277 • Fax: 617-263-2324 e-mail: cs@brillusa.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Linguafranca

"Academia's gadfly review"*

Winner of the National Magazine Award for General Excellence

Subscribe to the magazine that the *New York Times* called "A hip trade journal for the cerebral set." *Lingua Franca* is the review of academic life. In every issue it delivers the lowdown on what's being discussed, debated and debunked–with pieces like:

THE DEPARTMENT THAT FELL TO EARTH: Duke University's English department had a stellar reputation until its stars began turning their attention to other subjects: themselves.

TESTAMENTS BETRAYED: Yugoslavian humanists join Milosevic's regime. Can philosophical ideals survive ethnic cleansing?

AFTER HIS CLIMAX: His theories about sex competed with Freud's. He turned-on Bellow and Burroughs. What did Wilhelm Reich do that sent his ideas about orgasms to the fringe?

HOAX REVEALED: Alan Sokal publishes nonsense posing as cultural studies and fools the experts. His confession in *Lingua Franca* set off a major row in academia and beyond.

PLUS: In every issue, ground-breaking books selected and reviewed by the leaders in each field, plus coverage of what's just been published. And, annually, the Hiring and Tenuring Survey: our guide to who's been hired where.

* The Village Voice

YES. Send me *Lingua Franca* for only $19.95 for a full year (9 issues). I'll save over 50% off the newsstand price of $4.95 per copy.

Name

Address

City / State / Zip / Country

PAYMENT:
❑ Check enclosed.
❑ Bill me. I will pay later.
❑ AmEx ❑ MasterCard ❑ Visa

Card No.

Expire Signature

Outside the US: add $11 for surface mail; $21 for airmail.
Payment in US dollars only.

S00701

RETURN TO: LINGUA FRANCA, PO BOX 5158, Brentwood, TN 37024-5158
FAX 212-684-9301 TEL 800-719-5854 EMAIL subs@linguafranca.com WEB http://www.linguafranca.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A "Third Way" to Save the Kibbutz?

Menachem Rosner

Jo-Ann Mort and Gary Brenner present a kind of recipe for saving the Israeli kibbutzim from the existential-economic-demographic–ideological crisis they are undergoing ("Kibbutzim: Can They Survive the New Israel?", *Dissent*, Summer 2000). Their article is mainly a description and analysis of developments at one kibbutz, Hatzor, during the1990s. The example of one out of 265 kibbutz communities is enlightening and illustrative, but of limited value.

The thesis of the article is that the traditional, egalitarian, democratic kibbutz cannot survive under contemporary economic conditions. The only way to save the kibbutz from the fate of past communal societies is to adjust to the new realities, choosing a "third way between collectivism and the market."

Hatzor's adjustment involved two reforms, both connected to changes that the kibbutz movement has been debating since the late 1980s.The first reform required a separation between the kibbutz community and its economic units. Market rules and hierarchical principles would be introduced in economic organizations, and many communal services would be privatized. But the designers of this reform still held that all material rewards should be distributed on an egalitarian basis. "Reform no. 1" in Hatzor was based on this concept. Over the years, various features of it were adopted in almost half the kibbutzim. The larger controversy in the kibbutz movement, however, concerns proposals for the non-equal distribution of economic rewards. Hatzor's "reform no. 2" is an example. In Hatzor today, members receive a "composite income." The market value of their work is one of its components; egalitarian and seniority rules also figure in its calculation. The first kibbutzim to introduce reforms of this sort decided that members' income would be based only on "market value," after internal taxes were deducted. These were kibbutzim younger and smaller than Hatzor. The kibbutz movements strongly opposed the introduction of a market value, nonegalitarian income. Hence, a number of compromise models were developed, chiefly in some of the multigeneration kibbutzim like Hatzor. In 1999, the fully nonegalitarian system existed in 10 percent of the kibbutzim, whereas in 12 percent the composite system was in use. Some kibbutzim set out with the composite system but then moved on to full non-equality. But the great majority maintain their original egalitarian principles, though the introduction of a form of nonegalitarian income is still an issue.

Since the Mort-Brenner thesis is that these reforms are necessary conditions for the economic success of the kibbutz, we would assume that the reformed kibbutzim are the most successful. But the evidence is to the contrary.

Recently, Dun & Bradstreet rated the economic performance of the leading 150 Israeli manufacturing corporations. Ten of these belong to kibbutzim, and in none of these ten have the nonegalitarian reforms been introduced; in some of them even "reform no. 1" has not yet been implemented. An interesting example is Kibbutz Hatzerim, the main owner of the corporation Netafim (the co-owners are two other kibbutzim). Netafim is a brand name for innovative irrigation equipment and drip systems. Annual sales are approximately $230 million; 89 percent of the products are exported. In Hatzerim the traditional egalitarian model is fully preserved. Successful kibbutzim like this one have made many adjustments but in a different direction. Many have developed new fields of economic activity—tourism, commerce, services, and so on. But their success is mainly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

related to changes in the strategy of their industrial plants. New products were developed and adapted to new markets; new technologies were introduced; joint ventures were initiated and sub-companies were set up abroad. In many plants—but neither in Hatzerim nor in several other successful kibbutzim— there was an increase in the number of hired workers. That is also a deviation from kibbutz values, but this trend might be reversible (it has been reversed in the past).

Sociological research performed in sixty-seven Kibbutz Artzi (the left association of kibbutzim) communities shows significant correlations between economic success and aspects of kibbutz organizational culture, such as the diffusion of economic information, opportunities for members to participate in decision making, dialogue about changing kibbutz needs, and individual work patterns.[1] The findings illustrate the connection between economic success and participatory democracy, not between success and inequality.

Mort and Brenner nowhere acknowledge that Hatzor is not a representative kibbutz. It was among those that found itself in deepest difficulty after the financial crisis of the seventies. The fact that many kibbutzim were and are economically more successful is indicated in their article only when they write that "there are a handful of kibbutzim that . . . maintain most of the historical framework of kibbutz collectivism, but for various and unique reasons, these few are financially solvent, even wealthy." This is a misrepresentation. The real picture is that there are many—not a handful—solvent and relatively successful kibbutzim that maintain the basic values of the kibbutz. Most of those that introduced the two reforms were in economic difficulties. Has their economic situation improved?

It is easier to examine the results of the first kind of reforms since these have been established for quite a while, in a relatively large number of kibbutzim. The first reform introduced in most of the kibbutz factories was the establishment of boards of directors. This step limited the influence of factory workers as well as the authority of the kibbutz general assembly. Except for the elected kibbutz members and responsible officeholders, most board members were outside experts, not kibbutz members. A research comparison found no difference in economic outcomes between factories with such boards and those without.[2] A similar picture emerged when comparison was made between kibbutzim that had undertaken a larger separation of economy and community and those that had not (this research, by Uriel Leviatan, is as yet unpublished).

It is more difficult to study the outcomes of "reform no. 2," because the first kibbutz that introduced a nonegalitarian system did so only five years ago. Only some tentative conclusions seem possible. The reform did not have an impact on the achievements of economic units such as factories. But it did improve the income-expense balance of smaller and younger communities. In the past, some of these did not manage to balance the costs of the services they provided with their income. When they introduced the nonegalitarian system, they also cancelled many communal services. Thus they balanced their budget, but opened a considerable gap in family living standards.

In kibbutzim like Hatzor, the situation is quite different. These are multigeneration communities, with a large group of founders who have retired after a lifetime of work. In some of these kibbutzim, the budget imbalance continued after the reform was introduced. On the one hand, larger salaries were paid to members with managerial or (some) professional responsibilities. On the other hand, there was a commitment to maintain the living standard of retired members and also to maintain communal services. The result is hinted at by Mort and Bernner: "reform no.2," they say, "may result in deficit spending and/or social unrest."

No convincing proof has been found that the reforms, especially the nonegalitarian salaries, have contributed to the economic improvement of those kibbutzim that chose to introduce them.

Another goal of these reforms, as the article states, was the improvement of the demographic situation—making the kibbutz more attractive for young people. A comparative examination of demographic data—prior to the introduction of the reforms and afterward—unfortunately does not indicate any improvement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The economic feasibility of the kibbutz is a necessary condition for its survival, but not a sufficient one. Survival depends primarily on the identification of members with communal-socialist values. From this point of view, the neoliberal ideology of "the intrusion of market relations into all spheres of life" is an even greater challenge than the neoliberal economy. The relatively low percentage of young people among kibbutz members is related to this challenge. The main problem with the "reforms" is that they surrender to this market ideology. The development of a managerial perspective, which the article exemplifies, is an expression of this surrender.[3]

Mort and Brenner vividly describe the gap between the young manager flying around the world and the kibbutz member spending his life raising turkeys. In Hatzor, as they tell us, this gap was even formalized when a "workers' committee" was established to assist and protect members negotiating their salaries. There is a basic contradiction between this step and the organizational culture and values of the kibbutz. Central kibbutz arrangements, such as rotation in managerial positions, were created specifically in order to prevent the establishment of a managerial oligarchy.

MANY OF THOSE hurt by the reforms had played central roles in the establishment of the economic foundations of the kibbutz. They are now workers who need a "committee" to represent them in front of the new managers. The latter reached their positions on the basis of general trust. Now they have been leading, as the case of Hatzor illustrates, a stubborn struggle to introduce "reforms" that reflect their managerial views and ensure their privileges. It is true that according to the complex system of "reform no. 2," the privileges are considerably reduced by the high internal taxation system and by the egalitarian component of the composite income. But the authors point out that this is a compromise that "falls short of achieving even minimal reformist expectations." The willingness to make such a compromise stems from the strong opposition the reformers encountered, and also from some legal constraints. The article stresses correctly that "accepting the market as the basis for salaries represents a historical point of no return." On the other hand, the countervailing egalitarian arrangements depend on a balance of forces, which might well change. It is worth adding that not all the young managers support the nonegalitarian reform, but most of its initiators belong to this group. In some kibbutzim the managers' threat to leave the kibbutz if the reforms were not implemented was a crucial factor in the decision.

On a deeper level, the trends of decommunalization are strongly connected with the transition of Israeli society from a highly egalitarian to a normal capitalist society with huge socio-economic gaps, based on a dominant neoliberal ideology. The nonegalitarian reforms, even when they follow from the best intentions, would serve to erase the differences between the kibbutz and the surrounding society. Several kibbutzim will probably lose their communal identity.

Like Mort and Brenner, I also believe that there is a need to "re-invent" the kibbutz, but in a very different way. Yes, there is a need for a better fit between members' aspirations and occupational opportunities; and yes, there is a need for a better form of social security. But above all we must reformulate the *raison d'être* of the kibbutz. In the past, the kibbutz was a pioneer in nation-building. Now, it can help to fulfill urgent tasks in Israeli society in the fields of education, culture, and social integration. Some beginning moves have been made in this direction, by the establishment of urban kibbutzim, for example, and by efforts by some established kibbutzim to address the educational needs of children in the communities around them.

There is no comparison between Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder's "third way," aimed at amending the capitalist system, and the radical changes in central kibbutz values and communal institutions advocated by Mort and Brenner. Judging by all the available historical precedents, the introduction of nonegalitarian reward systems has always been a crucial step in the decommunalization of communal societies.

The point is to avoid this fate, and to act while there are still chances for renewal. The achievements of many communities faithful to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kibbutz values and the large-scale opposition to the nonegalitarian reforms suggest that there is still a chance for ideological reorientation and institutional renewal. ●

MENACHEM ROSNER is a member of Reshafim, which belongs to the Kibbutz Artzi movement. He is professor emeritus of sociology and founder of the Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea at the University of Haifa.

1. Dany Zamir, "Economic success and coping with the crisis. The contribution of organizat.onal culture," University of Haifa. The Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea, 1995 (Hebrew).

2. Menachem Rosner, Dany Rosolio, and Michael Palgi, "Boards of Directors in Kibbutz Industry." The University of Haifa: The Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea (Hebrew), 1998.

3. Menachem Topel, "The Discourse of Technocrats and Others about the Kibbutz." Paper presented at the Sixth Conference on Kibbutz Research, 2000.

Gary Brenner and Jo-Ann Mort Reply

THE HISTORICAL lesson of the kibbutz in pre-state Israel lies in the deep pragmatism of its early leaders, who were committed to understanding young people and so created a medium for them to lead lives relevant to their personal needs and to the society around them. That pragmatic medium was the kibbutz, set up in an era of scarcity and nation-building. Only after that came the development and imposition of an ideology of strict communism, which has proven to be outmoded in today's global economy. The ideology of the revolutionary Zionist pioneers cannot serve the needs of third and fourth generation Israelis. The commitment to social justice can and should be the same, but its practical implementation has to be different in this century.

It is disappointing that respected leaders like Menachem Rosner are unable to come to terms with new realities, clinging instead to a lost world. Rosner's statement that the "kibbutz movements strongly *opposed* the introduction of the fully market value, non-egalitarian income" is especially telling (our italics). He must use the past tense because, in the last five years, the new leaders of Takam and Kibbutz Artzi (the old "right" and "left" kibbutz movements, now merging into one) have clearly rejected constructing red lines as each kibbutz struggles to save its community in its own way. Indeed, in recent interviews with us, the current Artzi leadership clearly stated its support for "pluralism" in the movement, including the differential salary model, as has the Takam leadership in recent newspaper interviews.

Frankly, as we continue our journalistic research on the changes in the kibbutzim, we are more stunned by the depth of the crisis than when we wrote our original article. No amount of sociological research or stubborn idealism can discount the truly profound crisis that the kibbutzim face today. If, after ten to fifteen years of painstaking deliberation, 22 percent of them have voted for some kind of differential salary system, intellectual integrity requires admitting that the kibbutz may have moved beyond a totally egalitarian economy. And the number choosing differential salaries continues to increase. But this juxtaposition of "egalitarian" and "non-egalitarian" gives a distorted picture of the kibbutz as it is and has been. Rosner is well aware of the preponderance of outside incomes even in the kibbutzim that purport to oppose change. This income has been part of kibbutz life for decades, coming either from individual members' outside families or from entrepreneurial work on the side. The movement has never been able to address this source of inequality.

Rosner can claim that the traditional kibbutz model works only because a handful (yes, a handful—from 20 to 40) of the 265 kibbutzim are financially solvent and therefore perhaps several years away from the salary model. We believe that eventually most, if not all, kibbutzim will move toward more privatization and independent decision making for their members. If they don't, they will fail to respond to the desires of the next generation.

Even in Kibbutz Gan Shmuel, a classic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Artzi kibbutz—and one that, on paper, opposes change in keeping with Rosner's philosophy—young people (handpicked by the leadership) told us recently that they want change along the lines of Hatzor. They want differential salaries and more independence. Each of the youths interviewed said that today kibbutz life is "not normal." If committed young people on a wealthy kibbutz are expressing such opinions, we believe that the social crisis of the kibbutzim seeps deep into the fabric even of the few prosperous settlements.

Although it is still early to say decisively that the changes we suggest will save the kibbutz enterprise, we don't agree with Rosner that the facts belie our conclusion. Ariel Halperin, who just completed a seven-year term as the trustee of the joint commission established by the kibbutzim, the banks, and the Israeli government to resolve the debt crisis, told us that "Wherever a kibbutz went to differential system of wages, there was almost immediate change for the good. The members are working more. The entire pie is growing." This is true for Hatzor, Kfar Ruppin, and Gesher Haziv, to name a few. Of course, the economic starting point for the changes varies from kibbutz to kibbutz, and so statistics don't tell the whole story. Halperin also points out that, contrary to Rosner's cheery numbers regarding a handful of kibbutz factories, today the kibbutzim's contribution to the gross natonal product is much below what it was in the 1950s. Rosner and his comrades may prefer to have a few rich kibbutzim survive at the expense of the entire experiment and hundreds of other, poorer, collective settlements. We, however, say no to that option.

The third way, in the context of the kibbutz, is far from the Third Way of Tony Blair and Gerhard Schroeder. We deliberately used lower case letters: this is the third way of isolated communities, far from the center, modestly but earnestly trying to overcome a decade of failure, to reconstruct their own social and economic life as best they can. Yet, it's irrefutable that independent kibbutz leaders throughout the country are coming to the same conclusions and searching for similar answers; unfortunately, they are not yet working together.

Had the editors of *Dissent* proposed an economic plan similar to that of the "young managers" of Hatzor, they would probably be condemned as unreconstructed communists. The failure of socialist intellectuals (there aren't all that many in Israel today) has left these managers to rely on their own resources. Most of them are in their fifties; only in the kibbutzim would they be called "young," a fact that reflects the flight of young people from the kibbutz and the demographic crisis this has brought about.

These managers also dreamed the dream; many of them might have preferred to be born into a generation of revolutionary sacrifice, draining the swamps while singing songs of freedom and equality. But they grew up in a different world, or they joined up at the wrong time. They tried to maintain the old system, which almost brought the community into bankruptcy. On the edge of the cliff, looking into the precipice, the choice was between a rapid descent, a heroic end, on the one hand, and an effort to "do" kibbutz in a different way, a "third" way, on the other. There were and are no textbooks about how to do it.

One of Rosner's more offensive comments refers to those who "have been leading, as the case of Hatzor illustrates, for over six years, a stubborn struggle to introduce 'reforms' that reflect their managerial views and ensure their privileges." Let us start with the "stubborn struggle." There have indeed been "long distance runners" in the struggle for social justice and a decent economy, who rightfully won the respect of friend and foe alike. But many of the opponents of change in the kibbutz, who prefer building walls around dangerously marginal agrarian settlements, show no respect for comrades who are still fighting the good fight. The opponents of change deplore "managerial views" and practices that in fact empower all the members of the kibbutz to manage the budget, understand the importance of cash flow, and join in the annual meeting to approve the balance sheet (which is now in the black). The opponents of change consider an 80 percent progressive tax, as at Hatzor, where only 50 percent of the community budget is privatized, and where property will (eventually) be distributed equally based on senior-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ity, as a means to "ensure privileges." We wonder if this is as terrible a regression from egalitarian ideals as Rosner implies.

FINALLY, Rosner refuses to acknowledge the most critical link in the sad story of the kibbutzim's dilemma: the significant changes in Israeli society. Where there was once a socialist-Zionist consensus, today, there is none. Indeed, the young kibbutznikim who, though questioning the current model of the kibbutz, still believe in the national project in its original form, hearten us. The kibbutzim still deliver a disproportionate amount of young people to the army's officer corps (over 40 percent in elite air force units are from the kibbutzim, now around 2 percent of the population).

For good or for bad, the overall social crisis in the kibbutz today is a mirror of the broader Israeli society. The kibbutzim can either face the crisis head on or they can pull up the drawbridge and maintain their own sense of purity against the raging, but very human, messiness of a transforming Israel. The kibbutz may be doomed to becoming a museum, but we hope not. It can still be an example to others: a viable economy, a small-scale social democracy, and a community of good and caring people providing excellent educational, health, and welfare benefits—a community that will, perhaps, prove attractive to a younger generation. ●

GARY BRENNER is the marketing director of Solbar, an industry of Kibbutz Hatzor. He has served as secretary-general of the kibbutz. JO-ANN MORT lives in New York and writes extensively on Israeli, Mideast, and Jewish issues.

Democratic Socialists of America

Members of the Democratic Socialists of America work in immediate struggles for justice—as we build a movement for long-term social change.

We bring to our work a strategy for building alliances among social movements and a vision of a more just and equitable society.

Join DSA and become a card-carrying member of the largest and most exciting democratic socialist organization in the U.S.!

❑ Send me more information about DSA.
❑ **Enclosed are my dues!**
❑ **$50 sustainer** ❑ **$35 regular**
❑ **$15 low-income/student**
❑ Enclosed is a contribution of $____ to help DSA's activism.

Name_____
Address_____
_____
City/State/Zip_____
Phone_____

DSA on the World Wide Web: http://www.dsausa.org (e-mail: dsa@dsausa.org)

Return to DSA, 180 Varick Street, New York, NY 10014 212/727-8610

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Midwest by Midwest

Nicholas Howe

THE SIMPLEST way to locate the Midwest is to accept that its borders aren't fixed on the map. Unlike New England, which is a culture of six identifiable states, or the South, which at the very least includes the states of the Confederacy, the Midwest shifts from gaze to gaze. That is why it persists in the American imagination, why it belongs to our idiom for talking about the way people live and have lived in this country, regardless of their address. As an adjective, Midwestern is inescapable because of the ways Americans move about while retaining the markings of place. Its elusiveness makes it interesting, and also necessary.

Taken generously, and that is the region's proper measure, the Midwest extends west to Kansas and Nebraska, south to the border states along the Ohio and Missouri rivers, north to the Canadian border, and east to the industrial cities of Pittsburgh and Buffalo. Within that territory, the Midwest is both rural and urban, agrarian and industrial. Kansas and Iowa belong to the Midwest because they grow huge quantities of grain; Buffalo belongs because for generations it milled that grain. Separate the one from the other, and the place slips from view and becomes a series of clichés.

That it displays this inescapable connection between rural and urban, agrarian and industrial is the great strength of the exhibition of paintings and photographs mounted by the Columbus Museum of Art. Titled "Illusions of Eden: Visions of the American Heartland," it will travel over the next year to Vienna and Budapest, as well as Madison, Wisconsin, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. An itinerary of Middle America and Mittel Europa makes for an interestingly trilingual catalog, a gentle corrective to those who might think the American Midwest embodies the provincial. In his essay for that catalog, Robert Stearns explains that the show was structured around "five motifs that reverberate within the region: journey (history and mobility), garden (land and topography), home (family and community), work (labor and industry) and word (knowledge and belief)."

If it's hard to imagine any exhibition devoted to a sense of place without these five motifs or others much like them, that should be a warning that there's a whole lot of mythmaking going on in this show. To judge from this exhibit, at least, the Midwest was not a place much represented by outsiders. Most of the paintings and photographs in "Illusions of Eden" were done between 1920 and 1940 by artists who were born or lived in the Midwest. It is, almost entirely, a show of work by natives looking at their home place. Midwest by Midwest.

As a kind of postmodern coda to the main body of the exhibit, there are pieces by four contemporary artists: Maya Lin, Kerry James Marshall, Malcolm Cochran, and Mary Lucier. Each has a connection to the region, either by birth or residency, but each also belongs to a larger contemporary culture of art that is avowedly global rather than programmatically regional. Their relation to the Midwest seems more allusive than direct, more a matter of work for this show than the preoccupation of their career. If that makes their contributions in some ways more interesting than those of the artists from earlier generations, it also tells us something very different about the Midwest—a story about coming and going, not about staying; about portraying the Midwest after knowing the capitals of the world.

Historically, it was the railroad that connected the rural and the urban Midwest in the nineteenth century, and not surprisingly it figures throughout the images collected in this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

show. For painters and photographers as various as Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Burchfield, Aaron Bohrod, Cameron Booth, Nathan Lerner, William Sommer, Gordon Parks, the railroad matters. Sometimes it seems a mechanistic intrusion on the farm pastoral, sometimes the means by which the bright and ambitious escaped small towns for the metropolis, sometimes a reminder in cities of the countryside that supplied them with raw materials for their industries. Whichever way, the railroad figures as the serpent in this Eden, the machine that joined this garden to the rest of the world.

Landscape painting after landscape painting in this show works by turning the Midwestern topography into a patchwork quilt; the fields define the seemingly limitless space, and puffy clouds fill up the all too vast sky. The quilt metaphor here is exact because these images domesticate the landscape. John Steuart Curry's *Wisconsin Landscape* (1938-39) and Adolf Dehn's *Late Autumn in Minnesota* (1948) are two examples of this domestic paradise: cozy, contained, comforting, delineated, protected. Or, by another gaze: rigidly fixed, monotonously rectilinear, claustrophobic. Many of these paintings celebrate fertility in the most obvious ways. The gentle hills of the landscape swell like ripe breasts, the gullies suggest vaginas. Grant Wood's *Spring Turning* (1936) manages to combine both in ways that might surprise viewers who know him only from his *American Gothic* (1930). The green or gold of the fields in so many of these paintings is less a shade taken from nature than a color meant to glut the eyes. Some of the painters seem to have read F. Scott Fitzgerald's reference to the "green breast of the new world" at the end of *The Great Gatsby* too literally for their own good. Once he left the Midwest, Fitzgerald knew enough to keep it as a metaphor.

John Rogers Cox's *Grey and Gold* (1942), offers the signature image of "Illusions of Eden." It shows a darkening, roiling mass of storm clouds (the gray of the title) moving across a landscape of perfectly aligned, almost razor-sharp fields of grain (the gold). In the near foreground, the fields are cut neatly into four by a crossroads with telephone poles bearing election posters for the local judge. It's hard not to see this as a piece of war propaganda: the abundance of the land in its fecund goldenness will survive the blackening clouds of war. Even now, clichés inevitably gather about this painting as one tries to describe it. In fact, the catalog notes that Cox won Second Medal in the "Artists for Victory" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1942 for *Grey and Gold*. (Curry's *Wisconsin Landscape* took first.) His painting is the precise visual counterpart to Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma!*—another wartime myth about the American heartland as a place of fertile corn "as high as an elephant's eye."

THE IMPLICIT opposition in Cox's painting is between the agrarian Midwest and all that lies outside. With that simplification, it misrepresents the place. To evoke the doubleness of the Midwest one can turn to a pair of paintings with almost identical names and radically different visions: Dale Nichols's *End of Day* (1935) and Charles Burchfield's *End of the Day* (1936-1938). Nichols shows us a winter farmstead with a man riding home on a horse-drawn sleigh; Burchfield gives us the working-class neighborhood of a small industrial town (Steubenville, Ohio) as workmen trudge home up a long hill late in a winter afternoon. Nichols works in glamorous Nordic ice-blues that freeze the scene; Burchfield evokes the tonalities of early photography, black and white with a sepia wash, so that he seems almost to paint in soot. The buildings in the Nichols have sharp, straight rooflines untouched by weather and the weight of the snow; the hillside houses in the Burchfield sag under the snow, the downward pull of gravity, the sheer hardness of life. Looking at the Nichols, one doesn't sense the cold of the winter day, nor should one, because it is winter pastoral; looking at the Burchfield, one feels the slush on the streets seeping into one's boots.

In basic, though not explicitly ideological terms, these are political paintings. Nichols celebrates the independent agrarian life of the well-maintained farmstead; his farmer stands proudly as he drives his sleigh into the barn. Burchfield depicts workers making their way home, lunch pails in hand, after a long day in the mill. Their heads, bowed against the wind,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are covered in old hats and cloth caps. Each walks alone, isolated; the day is turning dark despite the weak, yellow glow of the streetlight. The contrast between the two paintings is hardly fair, because if Nichols is a competent portrayer of the scene, Burchfield drafts his townscape to show the poverty, the exhaustion of industrial life in the Midwest. The men he depicts are tired, faced with a long walk home uphill at the end of their shift. Nichols's painting is cold, icy, solitary; Burchfield's is gray, painfully precise, suffused with a sense of solidarity for those it depicts. There is no green breast of the landscape here, only the residential outskirts of a drearily satanic mill town.

The paintings in "Illusions of Eden" are rarely as contained, as vignette-like as Norman Rockwell images of small-town America; most of their painters were after something much larger and more resonant: rendering the Midwest as the heroic and archetypal landscape for the greatness of American life. A few of these painters, arguably the greatest of them (such as Burchfield), saw another landscape of deprivation and desolation, both material and spiritual. But almost none of them seemed content simply to produce images that could be taken in at a glance and approved of with a quick smile. Driven by this ambition, they took as their subject either the fecund landscape of the rural Midwest or its cities, where the produce of the landscape was converted into manufactured goods. They were after something more than magazine covers; they meant their work to be big, heroic, a visual match for Carl Sandburg's poetry. And that may explain why some of their paintings are so awful, so inadvertently like caricatures.

WHETHER URBAN or rural, the painters worked on the large scale. Sometimes this scale leads to a certain crudeness in their work. People in their landscapes often seem too big, too ennobled by muscles; they are almost never the agitprop monsters of socialist realism, but they rarely fit their surroundings as persuasively as do people in Constable or Millet. Only in the photographs, especially those taken for the Farm Security Administration by Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, and Ben Shahn, do human bodies seem to fit into the scale of the scene in which they move, live, and work.

If nostalgia is the sickness that comes of being separated from home, then this show might be called in the strict sense of the term nostalgic. Its images, virtually all dating from the 1920s-1940s, depict a world that even in those years was slipping away. Several generations later, I am reminded as I look at these paintings that the biggest factory in the state of Ohio, where agriculture still dominates the state's economy, is the Honda vehicle factory in Marysville, some twenty miles northwest of Columbus. It was recently built on what had been open farmland; it does not belong to the old rustbelt Ohio of Youngstown, Cleveland, Akron, Toledo. The Honda plant seems a monstrous intrusion on the landscape, as if dropped from some alien planet on small-town America. But today, small-town America wants factories because that's where the jobs are, as private farm after private farm gets sold to agribusiness.

Sometimes, these paintings can surprise, can force one to look again and again. Consider John Steuart Curry's *The Old Folks (Mother and Father)* (1929), a portrait of his parents on the edge of old age. They sit in their parlor on either side of a window that looks out at their barnyard. That scene, a vignette painting within the larger painting, displays all of the cherished icons: barn, silo, animals, windmill, blue sky with puffy clouds. To complete the scene, Curry has their dog standing with his front paws on the window sill so he can look out. The parents are beautifully figured Midwesterners of a certain age, far more convincing than the dead-looking couple in Grant Wood's *American Gothic*. (I, for one, am deeply grateful that this painting was not included in the show because its iconic status makes it hard to look again at the Midwest.) In Curry's painting, the woman is fine-boned, neat, with simple hair; she has kept a certain elegance about her. She knits as she sits in her wicker rocking-chair. Her husband is aging but still powerful; his hands speak of long work on the farm. He is dressed quietly in overalls and a suit jacket, a rolled newspaper rests in his left hand but he looks out the window at his farm. The iconography is precise: his gaze is outside the house toward the farm; hers is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

domestic and interior, fixed on her knitting. They do not speak, but one senses that they hardly need to after all the years.

A perfect bit of Americana, or so one thinks before moving on to the next painting. But Curry has more to say about the life of his parents. Set back in the upper corners of this painting, hidden in the shadows but still visible, are an electric fan and a wall telephone. The Currys may be Midwestern to the core but that includes keeping up to date with the modern conveniences. The world has changed, but to see it one has to look in the corners and not at the stereotypical image at the center of the painting. It is a cautionary lesson against those painters who depicted the Midwest as a bastion of the old values.

The difficulty of looking at Midwest by Midwest, as well as its irony, is that Curry could be a nostalgic painter himself. His melodramatic *Tornado over Kansas* (1929) shows a family heading for the storm cellar as a twister nears: the lovely mother looks madonna-like with baby in arm, the father Michelangelesque in his muscles, and the three children groomed to model for Norman Rockwell. The only thing that looks like it belongs in Kansas is the chicken in the foreground.

LOOKING AT THIS show makes one see the Midwest again as contested territory: Is it a rural paradise, an Eden, an idyll? Is it a place of hard industrial production in factory towns and cities? From these questions, it follows that it must also be contested territory in terms of how it gets represented visually. Most of the painters in the show, from the famous ones such as Wood and Benton to the lesser-known ones such as Lois Ireland and William S. Schwartz, have a mythic sense of the place that affects their palettes; they tend to favor a rather garish range of colors: the landscape is saturated in color but so are the town buildings and the clothes people wear. In so many of these paintings, what's missing is the color of dust, the sense of earth being carried by the wind. It's another form of idealization, this vividness. Anyone who thinks of the Midwest as a dull, grayish place will be surprised by the ways its own painters colored it.

For the photographers, all of whom worked in black and white, the matter of color takes a different form because they tended to print their photographs with strong contrasts: the shadows run to deep black, the buildings, like prairie churches and grain elevators, to a stark white. Their tonalities are moody, dramatic like Gordon Parks's *Frisco Railroad Station, Fort Scott, Kansas* (1949), a photo taken at night and printed to look it. Through this kind of printing, the photographers, especially those who worked for the Farm Security Administration, gave the Midwest their own version of mythic status.

Looking at these art photographs (as distinguished from those taken by anonymous photographers for commercial agencies) reminds one of the time when people trusted in the unmanipulated veracity of the black-and-white photo image, when it still seemed to distinguish itself with that documentary power from painting. And for all that we today are right to see through such claims about photography, we also lose something: the way these images were meant to stand against the candy-box colors and easy cultural clichés of the dominant aesthetic. Such photographs said, strip away the color that glosses over so much; admit the extremes of black and white, of radical difference; sharpen the focus until it hurts to look. Don't give the viewer any comfortable place to stand, any consoling gesture of prettiness. It is hard to look at the sentimental pictures of neat farmsteads after you have thought about what Russell Lee captures in a simple image of a woman, shown only from her knees to her middle torso: *The Hands of Mrs. Ostermyer, Wife of Homesteader, Woodbury County, Iowa* (1936). There isn't a painting in this show that can match the historical testimony of this photograph or its dignified and beautiful modesty.

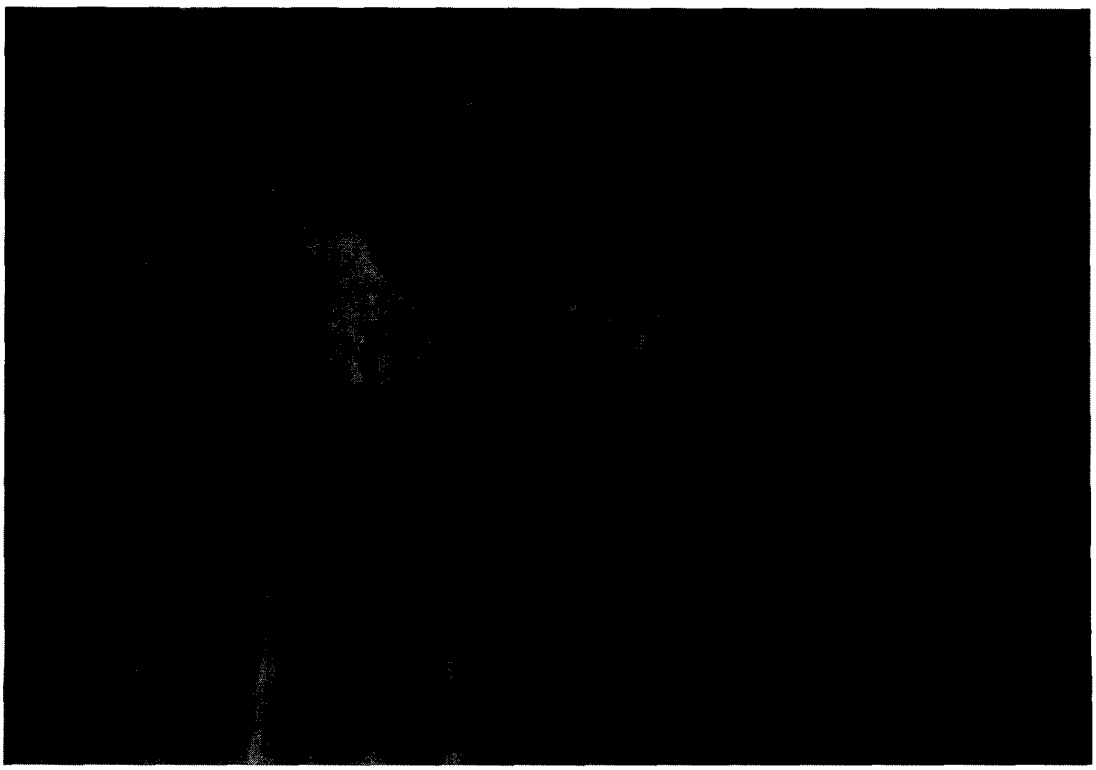
Words like politics and ideology don't quite seem right for many of these images, not so much because they lack evident politics but because they position themselves in a region where shared values come before politics, in time and in significance. Slippery though it is, values is the right word because it points to a shared moral sensibility and helps to catalog the social rituals that become occasions for belief: the Sunday dinner eaten outside on the porch (Clarence Holbrook Carter's *Let Us Give*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thanks, 1943); the family reunion with women tending the tables and men lounging under the trees amid their cars (Virginia Cuthbert, *Schellhammer Family Reunion*, c. 1938); the tree-planting ceremony at the schoolyard on Arbor Day (Doris Lee, *Arbor Day*, c. 1941); the promenade through the commercial district of Canton, Ohio, in front of *Grants The Economy Store* (Clyde Singer, *Street People*, 1936); the visit to the barbershop where the artist paints himself as the customer (Aaron Bohrod, *The Haircut*, 1936). These images belong to a community in which values are more fundamental than any explicit politics. Certainly, these values translated historically into a formal politics, usually of a conservative Republican variety interspersed with pockets of progressive or populist sentiment, but they also lent themselves to conventionalized depictions because they were the common currency of the place. Aside from some of the landscapes, these images show very little sense of sexuality. That reticence is another of their values.

Values are hard to represent aesthetically. At their most forthright, they can read as clichés; at their most manipulated, they usually yield kitsch. When a great deal of painterly skill goes into rendering these images in color, they slip all the more easily into kitsch; the skill of the technique emphasizes the lack of scrutiny or questioning in the image. In this show, the later a painting dates in the period, the more kitschy it can seem because its distance from the portrayed scene is all the more obvious, as is its desire for it. There are thus strange moments of temporal disjunction: in 1939, Grant Wood paints *New Road*, a depiction of a road that has just been cut through a pristine farm landscape as if it were a hundred years earlier; in 1935, Aaron Bohrod paints *Skokie Park Auto*, a junkyard scene almost as pleasing to the eye as any of the pastoral landscapes in the show. Emerson Burkhart paints another junkyard in 1947, but it's also more charming than sinister, despite its clever title: *Fragmentary History of the Iron Age*. None of them seems true to its moment: the Wood looks prettified and anachronistic; the Bohrod and Burkhart just prettified.

One strategy of these painters for avoiding



Russell Lee *The Hands of Mrs. Ostermeyer, Wife of a Homesteader*, 1936. Courtesy Columbus Museum of Art.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the trite or kitschy is to adopt, as sophisticated and trained painters, the gestures of American primitivism. This is especially evident in Grant Wood's work, such as his *Adolescence* (1940), a representation of a young male chicken flanked by two large hens; or his *The Birthplace of Herbert Hoover* (1931), a painting as strange to contemplate as its title suggests it would be, one year before Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president. If decadence can refer to a knowing, even cynical use of exhausted artistic forms, then these are decadent paintings, despite their utterly wholesome images and themes.

In the midst of these pure products of the American Midwest, one wants to find images that make one see for the first time what one has looked at or driven by thousands of times. Kitsch is kitsch at least in part because it tries very hard to remove the element of surprise or shock or even just of seeing anew. In a simple painting by Cameron Booth of a railroad bridge with steam locomotive passing on it above a city street with cars, trucks and pedestrians, one gets this seeing anew. Partly it is because the factory buildings here have the narrow windows and two-dimensional solidity of city buildings in fifteenth-century Italian paintings, and partly it is because Booth registers the ways in which trains changed the topography of modern cities. Here the locomotive crosses at grade level while the vehicles and pedestrians move beneath it through an underpass. In that sense of the city as both Renaissance invention and modern industrial zone something gets seen that changes the way one looks at a site as common and as unmythic as Booth's title: *Washington Avenue and Milwaukee Railroad Bridge* (1936).

In paintings of the Midwest, kitsch is most likely to appear when the painter tries to freeze a moment from the past for the self-satisfied pleasure of the present—Bohrod's self-portrait in a barbershop mirror is a good example. That is also why the black-and-white photographs, especially those taken by known photographers but also some of those taken by anonymous employees of commercial studios, speak so directly and feel so much less burdened by unearned sentiment. Those who made these photographic images resisted any comforting sense of the past, and thus could register the hardness of the present. The photographer and writer Wright Morris puts it exactly: "I saw the American landscape crowded with ruins I wanted to salvage. The depression created a world of objects toward which I felt affectionate and possessive."

Morris's own image of a water pump in the middle of the main street of Manchester, South Dakota, suggests just such a ruin, and serves as well as a reminder of the mysterious tenuousness of life in the heartland. Another, yet more mysterious image is Dorothea Lange's brilliant photograph *On the Great Plains, near Winner, South Dakota* (1941) which shows three white churches built on the open prairie within several hundred feet of each other—and nothing else. That image gets the eerie or uncanny sense of the Midwestern openlands better than any of the overripe landscape paintings in "Illusions of Eden." What Morris and Lange show in their photographs is the starkness and scale of the place in which successful human habitation seems almost a miracle against long odds.

These lucid, informed images by Lee, Lange, and others call into doubt the muted, even off-putting title of the exhibition: "Illusions of Eden: Visions of the American Heartland." Heartland is, of course, an old and unobjectionable metaphor for the Midwest; Eden is an even older metaphor for America as a place of born-again, second-chance fertility. Some of the artists in this show painted as if they were pretty close to Eden, but most of them would probably have joked that if Eden is an idea, the Midwest is the real thing. But why "Illusions of Eden"? Whose illusions? Thinking about some of these paintings and their attempts to render an earthly paradise, this use of illusions almost seems a careless slip for "allusions." Taken as printed, in the context of this show, the word seems wrong because it suggests that the curators feel superior to the images, or more knowingly sophisticated. The word also sets to the periphery all images of urban life because they bear no reference to this sense of Eden. "Illusions of Eden" suggests that the strength of these representations lies in the rural and agrarian, in the work of Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and the others. So it may, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that's only one version of the Midwest. And taken by itself, it's also the tritest. A more honest title for the show would have been, as one contributor to the catalog almost suggests, "Field of Dreams," because, baseball movie and all, that would have located this show's sense of the Midwestern idyll in fields and landscapes, in dreams that were more sustaining than illusions. It might not be a more accurate title for the Midwest as a region but it would capture the intent of this exhibit more honestly.

THE FOUR contemporary artists invited to participate—Maya Lin, Kerry James Marshall, Malcolm Cochran, and Mary Lucier—have a more abstract and attenuated relation to the Midwest than did Benton, Curry, Bohrod, Burchfield, and the others. That may be why there is so much text, especially interviews, devoted to these four in the catalog. Yet they also seem to have learned a great deal from their predecessors about the aesthetic dangers and costs of a too literal regionalism. They give us ironic, coded gestures toward the Heartland, and in that sense can seem provocative and engaging. But they are not, finally, why the Midwest still speaks to the American imagination.

Or to American political history. Looking at these paintings one sees why any left-wing collective politics, any true socialism, was unlikely to succeed in the United States. Image after image celebrates identity rooted and sustained by the agrarian life of the individual farm. The landscape belongs to those who cultivate it in neat, self-contained parcels. There seems to be no place to gather, to share a sense of common identity, other than the church. And even that institution rarely figures in these images. Eden is the garden that each man, and the gender reference is deliberate, must remake for himself somewhere in that broad region of America. Now, several generations later, that sense of Eden seems less an illusion than a delusion as the traditional province of the independent American farmer becomes yet another big industry, one as capable of fouling the environment as any big city mill was in the 1930s. Chicken shit turns out to be just as poisonous as industrial effluvia.

The heartland remains, though, in the Midwest, because we need something to balance bicoastal America, where we have come to believe the new and exciting happen. And yet, that is where the Midwest gets continually evoked, rebuilt, celebrated, and betrayed in one suburban community after another. For in the years since World War II, that's where America from sea to sea made its spiritual Midwest, as it sought to escape the urban for the pastoral. Illusions of Eden could almost be the name of a new suburban development. ●

NICHOLAS HOWE teaches English at Ohio State University.

Add dimension to your sociological research

sociological abstracts

Comprehensive, cost-effective, timely

Abstracts of articles, books, and conference papers from nearly 1,500 journals published in 35 countries; citations of relevant dissertations as well as books and other media.

Available in print or electronically through the Internet Database Service from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (*www.csa.com*).

Contact *sales@csa.com* for trial Internet access or a sample issue.

sociological abstracts

Published by Cambridge Scientific Abstracts
7200 Wisconsin Avenue • Bethesda MD 20814 • USA
Tel: +1 301-961-6700 • Fax: +1 301-961-6720 • E-mail: *sales@csa.com*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lucky: Consumption without Consequence

Ashley Nelson

Kim France wouldn't blush over her new magazine, *Lucky*, even if pink cheeks would flatter the posh outfits she adores wearing. As editor-in-chief of the latest craze to hit women's magazines—a publication devoted solely to shopping—she proudly asserts that it is not merely another fashion magazine encouraging unrealistic desires, but a tool that can help young, upscale women realize their fantasies. It picks out the season's favorite fashions before they hit stores, tells you where you can buy them, and for how much. It even comes with a page of stickers labeled "Yes" so that you can keep track of the items France says "you absolutely must have and just might die without." "Find it. Love it. Mark it. Buy it." It's that simple—and that shameless.

Simple, shameless and, France would add, harmless. In the *New York Times* in May, she described the new Condé Nast publication as a hobby magazine. "It's the same way that you might look at a golf magazine and see a spread of nine irons." The difference is, of course, that you buy golf clubs to improve your game, but you shop, according to France, simply for the "very real pleasure" of shopping. The debut Spring/Summer issue, with a circulation of three hundred thousand, gives readers the impression that they are fine-tuning a necessary skill—learning where to go, which brands to buy, and what "lingo" to use when doing so. But it also makes no pretense about promoting perhaps the only hobby that requires its participants to have an almost mindless and certainly careless attitude. There is no analyzing the approach on the brutal seventeenth hole at Pebble Beach. If it feels good, you can send the ball flying into the water hazard and still be a winner. In order to master this sport, you need only be impulsive, thoughtless, obsessive—oh, and female, but that, the editors suggest, goes without saying.

What is disturbing here is the ruthless way in which women are targeted as unreasonable creatures: impractical, primal beings whose desires are constantly in flux; perhaps a "Greek goddess" one day and an "Italian screen goddess" the next, but always reliably "girly." Countless captions refer to the "stuff we can't live without" and the fashions we'd "kill for." Face to face with these objects of affection, women seem incapable of responding to them rationally or even without breaking a sweat. The writer of one article on Web shopping whimpers, "I am trying to remain calm. Breathing, breathing. Here is a lovely site from the renowned gift shop of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City."

That women are hardwired to buy things—often anything—here precludes them from making reasonable decisions or from even thinking at all. "Impractical," for instance, is used alongside "elegant" and "addictive" to describe the advantages of a particular shoe style. Reflection is an empty term that comes between seeing an object and pulling out the Visa card. "My thought was," the Web shopper explains, "buy a classic." Or it is so determined by commodities that it is a pathetic form of contemplation. "Think Crate and Barrel with a groove," one writer suggests when describing a home goods store in London.

In an interview with *Inside.com*, France argued that intelligent women can find *Lucky* helpful and enjoyable. "All of my smartest girlfriends think plenty of hard thoughts, work at hard jobs, but they still like to talk about blowdryers. Part of being a strong, independent woman right now is flouting that part of you that can be girly. You no longer have to act like that means you're stupid." Acting stupid, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other words, no longer means you are stupid. And being independent means relying on fashion magazines to, as France says she does, give you ideas about how to look, what to wear, and even who to be. But there is no mention of any "hard thoughts" or "hard jobs" in *Lucky*. France responds to critics by asking, "How condescending is it to suggest that women need to learn important issues in fashion magazines?" But no one is suggesting that people, even smart, responsible people, can't have fun or enjoy life. The question is why is the unimportant, the "non-hard," defined as girly?

Above all, *Lucky* constructs a world of leisure, a place to escape from reality. There are no outfits for work featured here. That's because shopping, women's "abiding passion," is, according to France, "all about realizing your fantasies." If women's bodies are strewn all over the socio-economic landscape (behind desks or cash registers, breastfeeding or truck driving), from the neck up they are in the clouds, daydreaming of things to buy, people to be.

One article captures the "ideal" fantasy by photographing the adventures of three women locked in a department store. "Ever daydreamed about getting stranded in a department store overnight?" the caption asks. If not, a story-line above the montage, which features the women half-naked primping in front of mirrors, frantically searching for the perfect shirt, and putting on each other's make-up, lets you know just what you're missing: "Okay, I'll admit that by the end, we lost it and just had to try on everything at once, including about a thousand pairs of shoes. We made such a mess. I feel kinda bad. But I'd do it again in a second." And yes I said yes I will yes. It's Molly Bloom meets *Penthouse Letters* meets *Vogue*. Such a passage illustrates the absence of reflection on which the editors stake the whole magazine. Desires have the run of reason. The real world is on the wrong side of the locked doors. The goal is to "lose it," and to have no regrets. This is a woman's world. Often the magazine simply offers up a few carefully selected types of girls to be. It is at these moments that the editors exhibit their immense arsenal of adjectives. Three popular choices are "the blondest, prettiest A-list girl," the "urban-warrior princess type," and the "floral, chintzy, country bumpkin chic." Women—supposedly independent ones—are encouraged to buy their way into identity, the more identities the better.

Despite having an array of posh personalities to choose from, for most women these are unrealizable fantasies. Of course, no one will be the next sex symbol just by wearing a "woo-hoo! very like Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like It Hot*" skirt—even if she could lay down the $245. But, nevertheless, editors suggest that in *Lucky* they are presenting wonderful but also accessible dreams. In her "Letter from the Editor," France laments that most of what she dreams about is out of her price range. She hopes to rectify this problem for the *Lucky* reader. But it is very easy to spend $1,000 on a "simple" outfit here. Maxing out your credit card is a necessary evil in the quest to fulfill your desires.

The prices in *Lucky* bring readers down to earth, but only to make the launch into their dream world all the more exciting. For when you come to that critical point in the game, when you must think, "To buy or not to buy," or rather, "To spend or to splurge," you can always hear the writers, like cheerleaders at a sporting event, chanting, "Splurge! Splurge!" "A very distant cousin" of $545 fiberglass armchairs can be found for $50, but, editors assure readers, the originals are "worth the splurge."

These are not choices determined by one's sense of style, but by the size of one's wallet (or bravado in emptying it). Anyone who would normally spend $50 on a dress is not suddenly going to spend an extra $500 on another simply because she prefers its slightly more ruffled ruffles. But then again, if she's been buying *Lucky*'s message and has the credit, she might. Because ultimately these extremes represent the choice between reality and fantasy— and getting lucky is about escaping the one to attain the other, at all costs. The creators of *Lucky* do not make any apologies for their desires, however outrageous. Instead they present them as even more necessary than genuine needs. On the advice page, "Dr. Shopper" treats one "patient" who cannot find any occasion worthy of displaying her new $350 Christian Louboutin sandals. "In some deep, unconscious pocket of your soul," she tells the reader, "you feel that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your sandals are looking down on you." But take control. These shoes "are never going to allow you to wear them until you confront your label-and-cost prejudices and accept the shoes as fully realized members of your wardrobe, with the same rights and limitations as anything else in your closet." Excessive spending is hardly something to feel ashamed about. It is not even excused as something one does just every now and then. Rather, it is good for your health, and necessary for your confidence.

This rationale is that women can be reckless, dreamy, impulsive—and respected for it. Their fantasies have rights. They are protected by laws that exempt women from bearing any guilt for misfortunes caused by them. Dr. Shopper never considers that the reader may be ashamed of her purchase because now she can't pay her rent. Whatever the cost, the fix that comes of the department store hunt and kill must be had. Such consumption without consequence is most disturbing because it encourages readers to detach themselves from what exists outside the store doors. Isolated in fictions, worlds of make-believe, they sit happily unconcerned with those who cannot spend their every waking minute debating between the blue one and the brown one, ultimately deciding on both.

Perhaps this attitude is best captured in France's "Letter from the Editor." "Shopping," she mentions yet again, "is all about realizing your fantasies. In small ways, yes. But," she continues, "on days that are like most days in my life so far—days when I don't settle the conflict in Kosovo, win the lottery, or establish a system of economic and social opportunity that creates true equality for all—I'm willing to settle for the very real joy that there is to be had in finding the perfect kitten-heel pump." That France had the audacity to make such a dimwitted, shameless statement amazes me each time I slog through this line. With it, she completely dismantles her already weak argument that shopping represents only one interest in women's lives, by openly admitting that "on days that are like most days in my life so far," she hasn't really done much else. In other words, despite her efforts outside *Lucky* to argue that women who shop without thinking can still lead challenging and involved lives, the implication in the magazine is that, when given a choice between living a life defined by meaning or materials, women will (and should) opt for the second, more expensive option.

Women, apolitical, unconcerned, and unable, are best served by forgoing the difficult stuff and settling for the consolation that any flippant purchase can provide. There is only one very vague reference to work in the first issue, a page of "groovy accessories [that] will make your desk look totally top-drawer." Here "intellectual" space is constructed by the choice between buying a sophisticated metal stapler or a hip purple one.

There's nothing new about *Lucky*'s associating females and shopping. Most women's fashion magazines portray their readers as compulsive and irresponsible shoppers. But there is something markedly different about *Lucky*, something that makes one think, "Only now." Only now in the way post-recession days of one-click shopping and irrational exuberance could we have a magazine that does not conceal its abiding lust for material pleasures over all things, even, it seems, world peace. *Cosmopolitan* and *Mademoiselle* attempt—if unconvincingly—to maintain two discourses, one focused on "serious" issues like career and health and another on lighter topics like consumption and "him." But *Lucky* reminds us that today, for better or worse, you are what you buy; or better, you are who you are when you are buying. In the age of the fur wars, free-range chickens, and sports utility vehicles, Americans make their statements through what they purchase. It seems a rather weakened form of political activity; one that is based not on activism, but on passivity—on what you won't say, won't do, won't buy. Nevertheless, if women are to combat the denigrating portrait *Lucky* draws of them and prove they do have agency and ability, the first thing they should do is thoughtfully bypass both the magazine and its message. ●

Ashley Nelson is a graduate student in the liberal studies program in the Graduate Faculty at the New School.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Crossing Swords: Trees Growing In Brooklyn

Marshall Berman

LAST WINTER, *Dissent* published a symposium called "Where Will Critical Culture Come From?" Our thinking was organized around an image coined by Jules Feiffer in a 1998 cartoon. He portrayed a man who criticizes New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani's policy of erecting barriers on midtown street corners, supposedly to prevent jaywalking. In the end a policeman appears and arrests him. "What for?" he asks. Feiffer's cop's response became an instant classic: "For jaytalking."

In our symposium, seven other people and I criticized the world, the left, each other, and ourselves, and said some more and some less arresting things. I thought our questions were better than our answers. Our panel was drawn from too few ZIP codes and too narrow an age spectrum. Still, our shared desire for "critical culture" was right. And our image of "jaytalking"—discourse and dialogue outside the designated lines—had a resonance that I was sure would strike more chords out there as time went by.

We struck a chord in Brooklyn right away. Winthrop Holder, a social studies teacher at Sarah J. Hale High School, in downtown Brooklyn, sent *Dissent* a copy of his school's student magazine, *Crossing Swords*. (Edited by Winthrop Holder et al., Volume 7, No. 1, Special Twelfth Anniversary Edition, Summer/Fall 1999, 222pp.) All through the 1990s, he said, this magazine was kept alive by "The Society for Social Analysis," a group of dedicated students and teachers at Hale. Holder modestly hoped we could see "its (possible) place in creating a more critical and human culture."

Remember high school? It comes at a time of life when nothing happens and existence feels pretty vacant, then ZAP! We are swept up by inner forces that feel like too much. If high school works for us, we develop a critical culture there: we learn to think about our lives, to see what the world is like, to distinguish between what is expensive and what is real, to imagine a real place for ourselves. If it doesn't work for us, we come out as candidates for fundamentalist cults, as addicts of drugs legal and illegal, or just plain old respectable social conformist living dead.

The writers in *Crossing Swords* tell their stories and their hopes. They come across as smart, nice young American girls and boys. They dream of success and distinction. They fall in love, lament young love's betrayals, hope they can love again. They become drug addicts, have nervous breakdowns, and sometimes come back to life. They blend into gangs and then try to break away from them. They want their parents, elders, friends, neighbors, to see through stereotypes and recognize them for themselves; at the same time, they aren't quite sure who those selves are. They want America to change in large ways, but there is no movement for change with which they identify. They sound a lot like the soulful suburban kids in one of the 1990s' best television series, *My So-Called Life*.

READING these kids' magazine, I felt for them. I wanted to discover their collective story. Alas, their collectivity had just disappeared: on the very last pages, it was revealed that the Board of Education was going to close the school at the end of June 2000. In the 1890s, Alfred Jarry located his classic play, *King Ubu*, in "Poland, or Nowhere." A century later, I found myself looking for a place that inhabited a similar state of nonbeing—and so close to my home—on the same subway map. Still, I thought, even nowhere I should be able to find something. I got on the phone to Brooklyn and spoke to Hale graduates, teachers, ad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ministrators, education professors—one led me to another—in search of their lost world. In the light of what I heard, the kids' radiant normality seemed miraculous.

Sarah J. Hale drew students from several noncontiguous neighborhoods: Red Hook (where the Brooklyn Navy Yard used to be), Bedford-Stuyvesant, Sunset Park, and Williamsburg. These are very different neighborhoods, but they have two big things in common: nearly all their people belong to ethnic minorities and nearly all are poor. Actually, these have been poor minority neighborhoods for some time. Williamsburg was one when my mother grew up there eighty years ago. It is the setting for Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the classic story of a poor girl from an immigrant family, surrounded by sorrow, yearning to grow like a tree.

Hale's kids know more than they want to know about some things. Where they live, the "urban miracle" of the late 1990s never arrived. Drug gangs with big guns still rule. Racial profiling is an everyday routine, so cops may be as dangerous as crooks. Some kids learn a rough street wisdom. For instance, many know people who carry guns for self-defense; but they also know how easily this self-defense can self-destruct. Coming of age in combat zones, they have learned to see and speak and analyze with a clarity that great war writers like Ernest Hemingway or Isaac Babel would admire. Here is a girl in the tenth grade: "My cousin was intentionally killed because he was caught up in the wrong crowd and wanted to be down. My brother, on the other hand, was an innocent victim, in the wrong place at the wrong time." We don't know much about this girl, but we know she has lost her innocence early. Death has taught her too much too soon.

The kids choose life by turning to each other in ways that young people do everywhere. But in Hale's world, sex seems to lead directly to pregnancy, then to girls bringing up babies alone and feeling their lives are over before they start. Meanwhile, one boy remarks bitterly, "most of the 'fathers' take off like airplanes." These kids are intensely aware of sex as a human fact, but embarrassed and perplexed by its complexities. Of course, this isn't only their problem. Go to the movies in 2000 and you are sure to see beautiful young people take off their clothes and make love, without ever saying a word to each other about birth control, protected from pregnancy (and sexually transmitted diseases) by some magical process. The lack of sexual honesty and awareness in our culture today hurts kids from even our most privileged schools, but those kids have better resources to protect them when magic doesn't work. Has our culture progressed since Freud a century ago? Less than we like to think. Here is one place where "critical culture" has plenty of room to grow.

The kids turn to their school as well, yearning to connect their inner lives with a civic institution. For a time, Hale seems to give many of them just what they need. Their patriotism is sweetly normal: it is as if they are responding to the Beach Boys' call of forty years ago, "Be True To Your School." And the teachers, too, in their written introductions, glow with patriotic pride. But as we read on from year to year, we see how the institution that brings them together crumbles under their feet. Gangs from the streets move into the school (gang wannabes are even scarier), take over hallways, bathrooms, stairs. There are no leaders, no principal or assistant principal who can stand up to them. Is anybody even trying? Hale gets four principals in two years, and two are bounced out on the spot.

When kids appeal to school officials, they are told what Ring Lardner's father told him—"'Shut up,' he explained." And their faculty advisers, so imaginative and resourceful in creating a lively magazine, turn out to be as much in the dark as they are about why things are going from bad to worse. Readers of *Dissent* can recognize these advisers—they could be us. Indeed, some of them *are* us. It is sad to see them pressed up against the wall. The trouble here is not just lack of safety—students and teachers at Hale are used to lack of safety. The trouble is the school's metamorphosis from an alternative to the streets into an extension of the streets.

In *Crossing Swords*' last pages, tragic shadows close in. There is a suspicious fire. No alarm rings, which is itself alarming. No one is killed or badly hurt, but no one is arrested for what everyone knows is a crime. Afterward,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Board of Education brings in security guards, and life feels less desperate from day to day, but it also feels as if the authorities have come to see Hale in a purely custodial way. More and more students drift away. In June 1999, the board announces that the school will close in June 2000. When kids complain, the board announces that the school will close in June 2000. When kids complain, the Board says it's "nothing personal," just a matter of numbers (always bad, getting worse). It is acting as any normal corporation would, closing down a division that is running at a loss. Everybody is sad, but nobody is surprised, or even indignant. "It was the blind leading the blind," one recent graduate says.

Did it have to be this way? Hale had many strikes against it. Within the educational system, it was classified as a "zoned comprehensive" school. It drew students from a very large, heterogeneous district and offered both academic and vocational courses. It's worth noticing that schools like this have a great tradition behind them. They were among the noblest products of the Popular Front imagination. For several decades, they translated the New Deal into everyday life and created America's first really democratic people, the people who fought and beat the Nazis.

In the late twentieth century, that people became more inclusive, but also more fragmented. Meanwhile, in political economy, the deal shifted toward "flexible accumulation" (words Bill Clinton pronounces like the name of God) and "niche marketing." In education, this has meant ever-expanding "school choice" and a proliferation of schools customized to fit consumer desires.* In a world like this, big comprehensive schools like Hale face a structural disadvantage. They lose many of their students (especially those who are designated as the best students) to more flexible units: to "minischools," to "magnet schools," to "alternative schools" that are smaller, more narrowly targeted and intellectually focused. Where they have survived, in New York and all over America, it has been by breaking themselves down into smaller, specialized units that resemble their competitors—just as many big old department stores have stayed alive by metamorphosing into bazaars with numerous specialized boutiques. This structural transformation requires both great leadership and great luck, and many good schools, like many good stores, have gone down. Hale sounds like the girl's brother who got killed because he was "in the wrong place at the wrong time."

MANY STUDENTS leave when the closing is announced, but the *Crossing Swords* kids stick around for the last picture show. You can feel the sorrow. A boy says "I decided to stay for a purpose . . . . Our school will close with the same banners it opened with: Hale Pride." A girl tells of an aunt who taught her what Nietzsche taught some of us: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The last pages bleed. But these kids could teach us all grace under pressure. They have grown up too fast for real. Many of the older ones have made it to college, and maybe they will thrive on what they have been through. Maybe the younger ones will be able to thrive in the Brooklyn Heights School of the Arts, a new minischool that will soon be created out of Sarah J. Hale's rib. Of course, they will have to outgrow their heartbreak. They will have to overcome. But anyone who has heard their voices will believe they *can* overcome. That's what the girl's aunt and Nietzsche meant. Ripeness is all. Kids who can cross swords can cross the street. Maybe their teachers can help if they cross first.

Crossing Swords shows us how hard life can be out there, but also that you can come through a school of hard knocks with grace and dignity. Sarah J. Hale was a shelter from the storm, and the storm ate it up. That was a real modern tragedy. These kids are victims of tragedy, but also its survivors. They may be the last to leave, but they refuse to turn out the light. We know light needs solid institutions to sustain it. Even where institutions crumble, human memory and imagination can keep the light flickering. And this is where "critical and human culture" can come from. ●

*The ambiguities and nuances of this situation are explored by Amy Gutmann, "What Does 'School Choice' Mean?" *Dissent*, Summer 2000, pp.19-24.

MARSHALL BERMAN teaches at the City University of New York. He is at work on a book about Times Square.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Buy American

Ellen Willis

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH AMERICA: THE CAUTIONARY TALE OF A CHEERFUL CONSERVATIVE
by Norman Podhoretz
Free Press, 2000 248pp $25

IN A RECENT issue of *Commentary*, Norman Podhoretz pronounces *American Pastoral* Philip Roth's best novel, while confessing his uncertainty that this is a disinterested aesthetic judgment, because the novel's political implications resonate so well with his own views. At first this scruple struck me as misplaced. Though I agree with Podhoretz on little else, I was blown away by *American Pastoral*, which taps into the potency of the American dream—and the poignancy of American naiveté—on a level that transcends ideology. Contemporary fiction has offered few characters as compelling as Roth's protagonists, the New Jersey-Jewish star athlete and successful businessman, whose blond good looks inspired the nickname "Swede," and his Irish, ex-beauty-queen wife, who raises cattle. (Their daughter, who destroys their lives by becoming a Weathermanesque radical and bombing the local post office, is less well realized; by the end she is something of a caricature, leaving the impression that Roth understands her no better than her devastated parents do.) Yet after reading *My Love Affair With America*, I can more easily believe that Podhoretz would reduce Roth's complex and unsentimental vision to a political message, for this memoir-cum-polemic is shockingly one-dimensional and smug.

On being asked to review Podhoretz's book, my first reaction was that I had already reviewed it, twenty years ago. And indeed, much of it is a rehash of earlier works: once again we meet the poor Jewish boy from Brownsville, taken in hand and "sivilized" by an aristocratic WASP high school teacher, Columbia, and Cambridge; once again, the magazine editor who is seduced by the utopian chimeras of the left, then does battle against them. Though the introduction promises something new—a discussion of anti-Americanism on the right—the delivery turns out to be brief and perfunctory.

What is new about this book is signaled in the subtitle: "cheerful" aptly describes Podhoretz's demeanor, where in previous writings words like "contentious," "embattled," and, at times, "resentful" sprang to mind. Despite enlisting the likes of Henry Adams, Henry James, and Alexis de Tocqueville as interlocutors, his narrative is less a meditation on patriotism than an inspirational tract. Though Podhoretz's first and best memoir-cum-polemic, *Making It*, was also about his love affair with America, it was an affair with ambiguities and tensions. Now such complications are recalled fondly, as the early struggles of a long and prosperous marriage might be; the journey toward assimilation is invoked mainly as proof that Podhoretz has earned the right to be as earnest, not to say corny, in his patriotism as any character out of *Our Town*. Similarly, he likens his short-lived veer to the left in the sixties to an episode of infidelity whose resolution has left the marriage stronger than ever (as often happens in such circumstances, he displays a suspicious need to constantly reaffirm his passion). Self-consciously seventy, he embraces the persona of mellow elder statesman, even making some conciliatory remarks about the culture war, which he sees as having reached an armistice, or what others less cheerful than he might call a stalemate.

Along with Podhoretz's new mood comes a marked disinclination to focus his argument; he rambles and free associates on subjects ranging from his immigrant relatives to anti-Semitism to Saul Bellow, punctuating his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

text with long, footnoted asides. He seems to want to entertain his readers into agreeing with his point, which is that we live in the best of all possible worlds. His love affair with America and his more recent love affair with capitalism ultimately converge in a love affair with his own good fortune, which he apotheosizes in a chapter called "Dayyenu American Style." The reference is to the Passover song that recites the many blessings God has bestowed upon the Jews, ending each verse with "dayyenu" (it would have been enough). "America is not God," Podhoretz graciously stipulates; yet America, as he sees it, has bestowed analogous blessings on its citizens. After calling on us all to give thanks for the Constitution and its fruits, he gets to what, for him, is the heart of the matter: "If America had only granted me the inheritance of the English language, that would have been enough. But America then sent me to a great university," and so on. He ends the chapter, and the book, by thanking America for his apartment in Manhattan and his house in East Hampton.

Although this stuff verges on unintended satire, Podhoretz does not ignore the existence of Americans less well off than he. Rather, he repeats the standard conservative response to attacks on increasing inequality: no problem, because capitalism generates so much wealth that virtually everyone has enough; even the poorest American is rich by the standards of Bangladesh. In this vein Podhoretz invokes a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, according to which 40 percent of families below the official poverty line own their own homes, 92 percent have color television, and sizable majorities have microwave ovens, air conditioners, and cars. "What most Americans care about," he declares, "is what they have, not what Bill Gates and George Soros have." The left, in contrast, is mired in the complementary sins of ingratitude and envy.

I'm not in a position to assess the statistics, but the argument misses the point. What's wrong with economic inequality is not simply that one person owns more than another—it's that some people have the power to subordinate others by doling out or withholding the means of subsistence. The poor are those who have the least control over their fate and are effectively excluded from participation in a social world defined by access to material goods and cultural opportunities they don't have. From this perspective, the relevant frame of reference for discussing Americans' standard of living is not the third world but other advanced postindustrial nations, or better yet, our own recent past—the genuine mass prosperity of the fifties and sixties. And the impact on most Americans of the last two decades' dramatic upward redistribution of wealth is best measured by people's declining control over the conditions of their work and their lives. I don't care about Bill Gates's personal possessions. I care about the power of the rich to dominate politics and policymaking, to defund public goods, to resist regulation, to deny workers job security and benefits, to enforce long hours of work for low wages, to bid up the price of land and housing, to reshape all social institutions on the model of the hierarchical corporation. I care, in short, about democracy.

PODHORETZ recognizes that dedication to as-yet unrealized ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution might, as he puts it, "present itself as a higher form of patriotism." Though he can't quite bring himself to acknowledge that this brand of patriotism always competed with Amerika-hating third-worldism for the soul of the new left, he attributes his own left turn to "a limitless faith in the perfectibility of this country." But since this very faith implied dissatisfaction with America as it was, Podhoretz sees it as bearing the seeds of anti-Americanism. He makes the familiar argument that utopianism is bound to turn into hatred of a world and a people resistant to utopian aims, which is why utopians who gain power end up committing mass murder. It follows that America's best defense against this fate is democracy "as it presently exist[s] in the real world." This theme also informs Podhoretz's critique of various elements on the right. Paleoconservative nativism, the symposium in the "theocon" journal *First Things* that suggested revolution might be justified in view of the Supreme Court's refusal to overturn legal abortion, and Paul Weyrich's call for the Christian right to abandon politics because the Ameri-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can people refused to support Clinton's impeachment are all cited as unacceptably hostile to real-world American democracy. Here Podhoretz sounds almost like a liberal. After all, the left today has thoroughly marginalized its utopians, arguing that democracy as it exists is the best we can do (give or take a little tweaking to curb the worst excesses of the market). Yet it has clearly never occurred to Podhoretz that the ideology of laissez-faire capitalism is itself utopian—in that the free market is an abstraction that has never actually existed—or that its triumphal pursuit on a global scale poses a more formidable challenge to American patriotism than the delusions of nativists, theocrats, and third worldists combined.

The present status of the United States as "the world's only superpower" and headquarters of the world economy tends to obscure the fact that the American government must operate within bounds strictly circumscribed by the agenda of the world's economic elite. The new economic order entails a massive transfer of power from nation states to transnational corporations, from elected officials to unelected managers, and from national business classes with a stake in their countries' well-being to global conglomerates concerned only with securing the cheapest possible markets and ruthless about moving around their capital to discipline governments or buy them off. As a result, America is governed less democratically than it was thirty years ago, is further from fulfilling what to most people is its promise—which is not that the poor will own their trailers but that everyone, or almost everyone, will be middle class—and is no more a genuinely independent entity than the New York Stock Exchange.

WHAT DOES it mean to be a patriot under these circumstances? I use the word "patriot" loosely, to cover those of us who believe that our formation as Americans and our attachment to America's abstract ideals, its concrete culture, or both are relevant to our political aspirations. But in truth I find patriotism a problematic concept. Although it is not exactly the same thing as nationalism, it does imply an *a priori* loyalty to the nation (as in "I pledge allegiance to the flag"): one can count oneself a patriot, in the strict sense, and oppose American policies, even call for revolution—but only if one's assumed framework remains the sovereign state. And though I accept that framework for many practical purposes—I see myself as a citizen in an American polity, I vote, I would defend the United States if it were attacked by a foreign power—I resist it philosophically. In a larger political and cultural sense, I am for globalization, which is to say cosmopolitanism. It's globalization without representation, globalization on corporate terms that I abhor. In any case it is no longer a serious option to concentrate on preserving or extending democracy in one country, and the economic nationalism espoused by some on both the right and the left would be a futile as well as reactionary move. Politically it really is one world, ready or not.

This in no way means that an American left can ignore the country that remains our immediate context and, for most of us, a crucial aspect of identity. How then can our "Americanness" contribute to a democratic politics that transcends the American nation-state as such (assuming, as I do, that desires for freedom and equality are not intrinsically American, or Western, but human)? The possibilities cannot even be imagined, in my view, without recourse to that ecumenically maligned and dutifully repressed requirement of political creativity: a utopian vision. There's no denying the devastation that utopian thinking gave rise to—or became an excuse for—in this century; yet to pronounce it, in Podhoretz's words, "logically and psychologically inherent in utopianism" is a narrow reading of history. For if democracy as a utopian ideal can be said to have produced its negation in communist totalitarianism, it has also inspired our own long and continually unfinished struggle to put its principles into practice, as well as similar struggles throughout the world.

The ideal of democracy as something more than just "what is" is not purely abstract for Americans. It is a dynamic, if often submerged, element in our culture, reflected in the irreverence toward authority and toward one's "betters," the expansive optimism, the urge to transcend limits, the penchant for self-invention, the belief in material pleasure as a human right

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for which Americans are justly known. That these very impulses, especially the last mentioned, have often been enlisted in the service of corporate power and profits is also true. The point, though, is this: perhaps America's distinctive contribution to a global democratic politics is the idea of an immanent utopia—a vision of freedom and equality constructed from those democratic tropisms already embedded in our bones, a movement propelled not only by dissatisfaction with what is, but by appreciation of what is incipient. For me it's the wife in *American Pastoral*, with her fierce battle against being forever defined as "the former Miss New Jersey," who best embodies America's utopian strain—not the "revolutionary" daughter.

Right now, of course, the momentum is with the Podhoretzian view of America as a magnificent flagship that will capsize if too many people demand access to the first-class deck: can't they shut up and be happy they're along for the ride? For Podhoretz, though, even this is not enough; he wants everyone to be as happy for the first-class folks as the latter are for themselves. He deplores, for instance, the "ugly" response of liberal book reviewers to a memoir in which William F. Buckley Jr. describes "in almost lubricious detail" his luxurious life, from his "big house on the water" to his "outsized limousine driven by the perfect chauffeur (one of a host of equally perfect servants)," and concludes that "we are obliged to be grateful" for America's bounty.

Why Podhoretz is so insistent that people like Buckley—or himself—deserve to be applauded for kvelling over their assets is a question better addressed by psychoanalysis than by social commentary. But the poverty of his origins may explain his incomprehension that hostility to such recitations has less to do with envy, or even with p.c. moralism about consumption and greed, than with a more primitive bourgeois reflex: what middle-class mother has not warned her children that it isn't nice to brag about what they have? It's a nicety designed to preserve the myth that we have no classes in this country.

Podhoretz may imagine that he is speaking for all who have caught some corner of the wave of twentieth-century American prosperity, but what he's actually doing is spilling the beans. Does a patrician with a retinue of servants really fit the image of what America is supposed to be about—even if he's grateful?

There's an item in Podhoretz's "Dayyenu" litany that younger members of his own urban upper-middle, knowledge-producing class—surely a sizable portion of his readership—are likely to find particularly tactless: of course it's that Manhattan apartment, "much like the one in which the affluent parents of some of my classmates at Columbia had lived." After all, he must know that these days—as the price of housing in Manhattan has gone the way of tulips in sixteenth-century Holland, abetted by the gutting of rent regulation—no one but the truly rich can acquire such a place. Unlike the myriad poor displaced by rent inflation, the artists, writers, teachers, students and other assorted middle-class Americans now being pushed out of the heart of the city will not thereby lose a decent roof over their heads—"merely" the convenience and cultural amenities of a downtown way of life.

The irony is that with the escalating transformation of Manhattan into a plutocratic monoculture (and similar developments taking place in other "desirable" cities, from Boston to San Francisco), this very way of life, whose essence is social and economic variety, is on its way to being destroyed. How, amid the statistics debunking the importance of equality, are we to assess the loss of a version of America in which people of all classes and many cultural sensibilities must share the same space, non-drivers and other misfits can survive, bohemians and intellectuals and dissidents can find each other, and those of us with no taste for suburbia can feel at home? This land may be your land, it may be my land, but it is indubitably their real estate. Would that Podhoretz and his fellow cheerleaders knew the difference. ●

ELLEN WILLIS is the author of *Don't Think, Smile: Notes on a Decade of Denial*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That Was a Time

John Hoerr

STRIKING STEEL:
SOLIDARITY REMEMBERED
by Jack Metzgar
Temple University Press, 2000 264 pp
$69.50 cloth $22.95 paper

ON NOVEMBER 7, 1959, bowing to an injunction upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, the United Steelworkers (USW) ended—116 days after it started—one of the largest strikes in U.S. history. Without union-paid strike benefits, more than five hundred thousand steelworkers had stayed out for four months and shut down nearly 90 percent of the nation's steelmaking capacity. It was a massive display of solidarity rooted in a working-class culture that subsumed unionism, and it won the day. U.S. Steel Corporation and eleven other major producers abandoned their attempt to challenge union power on the shop floor and came to terms on a new industry-wide agreement.

It was a different time. Ronald Reagan had not yet demonstrated how to break a strike and decertify a union by hiring strikebreakers. American mills still dominated the world steel market. The USW still bargained on an industry-wide basis (though this structure was beginning to crack). But only twenty years later, in the 1980s, the union culture that Jack Metzgar describes so vividly in *Striking Steel: Solidarity Remembered* had no defense against a new economic order. Steel towns like Johnstown, Pa., where he grew up, lost their mills and fell into deep decay.

Practically everything that Metzgar writes about has vanished, leaving flawed memories and blurry outlines in the historical record. As a result, not only the 1959 steel strike but most accomplishments of unions in the 1950s have been ignored or downplayed by historians and many in the New Left. "Big Labor" is not a pejorative term for Metzgar; it did exist, to the betterment of society in general, but now it is being expunged from national memory. *Striking Steel* is, among other things, a persuasive argument against this willful and pernicious blanking out.

The story of the 1959 strike is the central narrative in the book. Radiating from this core are meditations on several related issues, including workplace relations, social class, and historical memory, along with fragments of a memoir. A photo montage on the cover shows a shadowy steel mill, an onion-domed church, a grim-looking mill worker in a hard hat, and a family of four outside their home in what obviously is a mill town. But this is not a typical memoir filled with bleak or charming scenes of mill-town life. Metzgar is not a descriptive writer. I can't see Johnstown in the text.

What I do see are sharply drawn profiles of relationships inside a working-class family and a marvelously complex description of union culture and work practices in a 1950s steel mill. Metzgar's father, Johnny Metzgar, was a semiskilled machinist and USW grievanceman in the Johnstown Works of U.S. Steel Corp. He was the quintessential shop steward who did not hate bosses but understood labor-management relations as a struggle between opposing interests. For him, "making the world right and fair was a daily, practical struggle." But the social and political revolutions of the 1960s confused Johnny, and he ended his union career in disillusionment. Etched in acid and love, this portrait of a militant union man with all his strengths and contradictions is the best I have read.

Johnny Metzgar went to work at the Johnstown Works in 1930 and risked his job to join the USW in 1936, before the company granted recognition. In the early 1950s, Johnny became a part-time "griever," representing work-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers in his zone on all kinds of problems, mainly dealing with contract violations by foremen. Jack Metzgar explains how his father viewed his union job.

> To him, the apparatus was a tool that, if you mastered it, could be used to confuse and intimidate management and, if everybody stuck together around the contract, could slowly but consistently erode management authority, put management on the defensive, and put lots of liberty and control in workers' hands, even without their filing a grievance. Often, it seemed, "shit was pulled" just for the delight of it, but if my father was to be believed, the unofficial shop-floor skirmishes that industrial relations scholars called fractional bargaining were a tremendous source of daily power, control, and even dignity.

The union did not come close to taking control of the workplace away from management. But one set of shop-floor rules, known as Section 2-B, frustrated local managers more than all others. In the 1940s, 2-B was incorporated in many company contracts to protect "past practices" that workers had grown accustomed to in individual plants, such as unusual weekly work schedules. Over the years, aggressive arbitration specialists at the USW expanded the scope of 2-B to cover crew size. Because the number of workers assigned to a given mill or furnace was defined as a past practice, any attempt by management to eliminate or consolidate jobs would violate 2-B. A company could reduce crew size only by changing the "underlying circumstances," for example, by installing new technology.

The industry's chief negotiator, R. Conrad Cooper of U.S. Steel, was particularly offended by this restriction on the right to manage. An industrial engineer enamored of Taylorism, he wanted to convert the mills into workplace bureaucracies run by stopwatch engineers. U.S. Steel pretty much ran the industry in those days. With the backing of U.S.S. Chairman Roger Blough, Cooper chose 1959 contract negotiations as the time to "win back control of the plants." Shortly before the bargaining deadline, Cooper injected new demands, proposing the elimination of 2-B among other things. He may have thought that rank-and-file unhappiness with USW president David J. McDonald would weaken the union in a showdown. He was wrong.

Many workers may not have had to invoke 2-B to protect their jobs or even be aware that it existed, but they knew instinctively that management's demands would eviscerate the contract and take away that small portion of control over their working lives that the union had won. They went on strike in July 1959 and stuck together through the summer and into the fall. Most steelworkers exhausted their savings or scraped along on pick-up work and perhaps their wives' incomes. But there were no back-to-work movements by disaffected workers, and the steel companies knew better than to import scabs.

The industry partially succeeded in convincing the public that 2-B was synonymous with featherbedding. But it could not convince mediators. This is one of the more fascinating aspects of the 1959 battle. In the scores of steel plants operated by twelve major companies (and three others that followed the pack) there had to have been many instances of work crews that had an extra member or two. But when a board of inquiry impaneled by President Dwight D. Eisenhower asked for examples of overstaffing, the companies could produce only one example and no evidence of widespread inefficiencies.

There were a number of reasons for this. Plant managers who had allowed outsized crews in the first place were reluctant to admit their error. A local manager may have agreed to a specific crew size in return for a work-rule concession in another area by the local union. In some cases, smart foremen had minimized the effect of 2-B by tinkering with operating technology just enough to change the "underlying circumstances." The more general conclusion to be drawn is that, although 2-B "sure looked like a license to loaf," as Metzgar writes, local unions generally had not used it irresponsibly.

By November, the cutoff of steel production had idled about a quarter-million workers in other industries, and the government was under pressure to halt the strike. The Eisenhower administration obtained a Taft-Hartley injunction forcing steelworkers to return to work during a sixty-day "cooling off" period. With Vice President Richard Nixon acting as mediator, the two sides reached agree-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment on a new, two-year contract in January 1960. The USW agreed to limit cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increases. But the industry granted wage and benefit increases that raised annual labor costs 3.7 percent and, most important, dropped the 2-B demand.

This was, as Metzgar concludes, "a decisive victory for the union," which makes its omission from history texts all the more curious. Many steelworkers themselves seem to have forgotten what they achieved in this strike, their recollections perhaps corrupted by the faulty version of contemporary union history accepted by the larger society.

But Metzgar draws a questionable conclusion about the larger significance of unionism in the 1950s. In that decade, he contends, seniority and work-rule provisions, along with well-functioning grievance procedures, provided relatively stable and secure industrial systems as an institutional framework for large wage and benefit improvements. Real wages increased more rapidly than ever before or since, producing a 62 percent improvement in the standard of living between 1947 and 1972. Led by union wage gains in steel, auto, rubber, electrical equipment, mining, and construction, the national average rose steadily with a corresponding increase in the standard of living. Unions used their political strength to push for social reforms. The fight against segregation was on the verge of becoming a mass movement among blacks; women began discarding limited expectations. "Contract by contract, strike by strike, grievance by grievance, [unions] were building up a realm of freedom for about one-third of the workforce, affecting lots of others."

I can accept all this and still not remember the 1950s as a "wonderful, liberatory decade." True enough, one can look back from the end of the century and match the upward slant of the wage line with now-documented improvement in living standards. One can see the beginnings of the civil rights revolution in court decisions on segregation and Rosa Parks's act of rebellion. Looking back, one can infer from the 1961 publication of *The Feminine Mystique* that women were becoming restless. Family life did not seem threatened by the easy availability of drugs, guns, and divorce. It was a time when workers, as in the 1959 strike, stuck together.

Scanning this evidence, Metzgar might well think of the 1950s as "wonderful" and "liberatory," a conclusion undoubtedly influenced by his own happy years as a boy, aged five to fifteen, growing up in Johnstown. He does not remember the fifties as an adult. I do, as a twenty- to thirty-year-old, and I have a distinctly different memory. The incipiency of liberating social movements does not seem so wonderful before the liberation starts. Even for a white person, racial segregation can be infinitely painful, and we lived in the middle of it. One did not have to be blacklisted to hate McCarthyism. The women's movement was a decade in the future.

Metzgar makes a valid point in acclaiming his father's generation of steel workers. But he is mistaken, I think, in choosing a former USW local president named Tony Tomko to exemplify the "one generation of workers who were not noble victims." Tomko was a leading rank-and-file activist in the 1950s and 1960s, but he played a less than constructive role in the union—getting involved in election fraud—in later years.

None of this diminishes the valuable contribution Jack Metzgar has made to labor history. The story of his father, the shop-floor leader who struggled day in and day out to force management to deal with workers "as men, not just 'hands,'" will not be forgotten. But Johnny Metzgar's union career petered out in the 1960s. The son writes of this painful period with unflinching honesty. "What happened in the larger society scrambled his earlier coherence," Jack Metzgar writes, and turned Johnny, "like many of his kind, into the sort of 'forgotten American' to whom George Wallace and then others appealed. In the process, he sometimes forgot his debts [to the union]."

The 1950s was Johnny Metzgar's decade, a time when "workers in major industries banded together to get a say in their lives," Jack Metzgar says, adding wistfully, "My dreams and desires are centered on making it so again." ●

JOHN HOERR, author of *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*, grew up in the steel town of McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Deposition for a Master

Keith Gessen

THE HUMAN STAIN
by Philip Roth
Houghton Mifflin, 2000 365 pp $26

WHAT PHILIP ROTH has always needed—and what, like Joseph K., he has been unfairly denied—is a proper trial. If not for the attacks on Jewish suburbia in *Goodbye, Columbus* or for what Irving Howe called the "rhetorical flourishes surrounding masturbation" in *Portnoy's Complaint,* then surely for the salacious, twenty-one-page, phone-sex footnote in *Sabbath's Theater.* He deserves a trial, at long last, with lawyers and learned professors, like the ones James Joyce and even Allen Ginsberg got. And he could use, as well, an urbane, sophisticated judge, like the one who included in his decision allowing *Ulysses* into the country a section almost wholly devoted to literary criticism: "Furthermore," it began, "'Ulysses' is an amazing *tour de force.*"

A trial for Philip Roth! For only such a spectacle, with its twenty-four-hour television coverage and solemn *New York Times* editorials, could clear his name at last of the accusation of unseriousness. It is an old accusation, and one can almost feel Roth straining against it in his last three novels, which comprise together a loose trilogy about postwar American politics. Near the beginning of *The Human Stain,* the final book in the trilogy, there is a scene in which a bereaved Coleman Silk, former dean of nearby Athena College, rushes to Nathan Zuckerman's secluded house and begins to pound upon the door. He demands that Zuckerman write the story of his downfall. "I—whose house he had never before entered," Zuckerman recounts, "whose very voice he had barely heard before—had to put aside whatever else I might be doing and write about. . .his enemies." This is not the first time the author has been so importuned, and initially he declines, only to take the narrative reins after Silk has been murdered. Though it arrives late, the encounter is a perfect symbolic introduction to these three novels: America, "the American berserk," is pounding on Roth's door, demanding that he do her justice on the printed page. Roth is hesitant, for he has some favorite subjects of his own to cover, but what sort of writer would he be—what sort of man, even—if he refused?

So there is a slightly put-upon quality to Roth's treatment of historical themes, as if, though acceding to the status of a Major Novelist, he will not observe the conventions, whatever those might be. Having had at sixties ultra-radicalism and postwar communism in the previous two novels, Roth in *The Human Stain* reconstructs the story of seventy-one-year-old Coleman Silk, a light-skinned black man who decided, when young, to pass for white, and who is eventually hounded from his deanship for an allegedly racist comment. The pressure of the battle with the university leads to his wife's death from a stroke and then to Silk's affair with a thirty-four-year-old janitor at the college, an affair so defiant it estranges him from his adult children as well as from the community at large.

As a novelist of sex, Roth is indefatigable. When he was still a graduate student at the University of Chicago in the late fifties, writing occasional movie reviews for the *New Republic,* the magazine printed a reader's letter mocking Roth for his naive moralism: "Didn't Mr. Roth's father tell him the facts of life long ago?" the reader chided. "Didn't he ever hear of physical attraction (sex, I mean—shhh)?" This, surely, is the least prophetic letter of all time, for in the decades since then Roth has never ceased mounting the barricades of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sexual revolution, only shouting louder as the crowd began to thin. Even here, several years after prostate surgery has at last repressed the irrepressible Zuckerman, there appears to the aid of the aging Silk—*pharmaceuticus ex machina*—Viagra!

Sex, which was once a nifty plot device in the form of Brenda Patimkin's diaphragm, has become an idea, an argument, and *The Human Stain* is the most tendentious novel Roth has ever written. He begins with a tirade against the "explosion of piety" surrounding the Clinton impeachment. "It was the summer in America when the nausea returned," he writes, "when the joking didn't stop, when the speculation and the theorizing and the hyperbole didn't stop." The apparent comparison here to the McCarthy years, or to Watergate, seems a strange one, and the assignation of major historical significance to the Lewinsky affair even stranger, until one recalls that, for Roth, propriety itself is the great enemy. He traffics in hidden energies, and the unwavering assumption that runs through these political books is that politics exists only as an elaborate projection of baser desires. "Fuck the laudable ideologies," Mickey Sabbath advised in *Sabbath's Theater,* and Roth does. *American Pastoral* suggests that sixties radicalism stemmed from sexual perversion and inadequacy. *I Married a Communist* argues that postwar Party membership was a front for homicidal rage. In this last novel as well, Roth peers out through a sexual prism: the title, after all, is a sort of private joke that includes among its many connotations not only the stain of human complexity and the stain of skin color, but also the conclusive presidential stain deposited one fateful evening onto Monica's navy-blue dress. Impeachment and political correctness and racism and deconstruction all derive, Roth argues, from the slavish suppression of our natural impulses. And from nothing else.

It's an incredibly, unyieldingly wrongheaded book. Even the conclusions Roth draws from his own narrative are wrong. The book turns on the surprise, delivered quietly on page eighty-six, that Coleman Silk is black. What this proves, Roth repeatedly informs us, is the unfathomability of actual things: "You *can't* know anything," he insists. "The things you *know* you don't know. Intention? Motive? Consequence? Meaning? All that we don't know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing." Wrong again; for if Roth's prose is hell-bent on anything it is knowing. Instead of the complacency we would expect from a writer at ease with the limits of his knowledge, we have these rousing italics, as if even Roth's sentences cannot contain his meaning, as if by tipping his letters he wished to uproot them from the page and propel them whole into the wide, rough world.

And the sentences, the endless outrageous sentences in which Roth delivers his frothing philippics repeatedly undermine whatever arguments he would like to argue. If he can be said to have a consistent political idea it is that fanaticism, for all that it's very entertaining, is hugely destructive—whether in the West Bank or the antiwar movement or college campuses or Congress. But Roth himself is like a madman digging for China; indeed, the digging is the essence of the Roth sentence, that barbed tangle ripping its way ever deeper toward meaning. If we can imagine a similarly circling writer like Saul Bellow as a sculptor, pacing about his mold of clay and gradually layering the details until a recognizable image suddenly congeals, then Roth is like a vandal in the studio, knocking off noses. Bellow's style accretes meanings; Roth's strips them away, tears from his characters' words their social obligations, from their backs their clothes, and then rips off their skin and tendons so that there is nothing left but the bone. *Not knowing?* Roth is determined to know the unknown if he has to exhume it from the grave. "That is how all this began," Zuckerman says as he looks back on his quest for Silk's story: "by my standing alone in a darkening graveyard and entering into professional competition with death." Fanaticism is bad—but Roth writes like a fanatic!

And that's just it. The outraged, self-consuming Roth of *The Human Stain* is a writer of nearly overwhelming force. To read the novel in its entirety, in the voracious, two-day assault that it demands, is to have a hole blown into you so wide that most other books cannot help but seem small, they fall through you and come out the other side with-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out touching a thing. Because if the history of politics and ideologies, for Roth, is merely an endless variation on the sexual theme, his characters' individual histories explode with the significant fireworks of errors, horrors, disasters. Roth is one of the few writers now working who is not content merely to skip, camera-like, along surfaces, to erect a set of facing masks and call it a novel. He is instead a plunderer of depths, and his respect for the domestic drama is in inverse proportion to his disdain for the historical one.

Just the size of the characters striding through Roth's last four books is astounding. In *Sabbath's Theater,* the relentlessly perverted Mickey Sabbath; in *American Pastoral,* the blond-haired, all-state Swede Levov; in *I Married a Communist,* a 6-foot-6 Jewish communist. Even men of regular dimensions possess heroic significance. "It was hard to believe, given the ardor and the resolve, that out in California they were college science professors," he writes of Silk's sons in *The Human Stain.* "You would have thought they ran Twentieth Century Fox." Then there's the old high school English teacher in *I Married a Communist:* "In Murray Ringold . . . human dissatisfaction has met its match. He has outlived dissatisfaction." But it is Silk, with his decision to shed America's most imposing imaginable identifier, who is the largest Roth hero of them all—for the human need to break through the firewall of propriety has always been Roth's great subject, and deciding, just after the war, to pass as white is a transgression even more serious than marrying a *shiksa.* "He saw the fate awaiting him, and he wasn't having it," says Zuckerman. "Grasped it intuitively and recoiled spontaneously. You can't let the big they impose its bigotry on you any more than you can let the little they become a we and impose its ethics on you.... *Self*-discovery—*that* was the punch to the labonz."

Reading Roth's aggressive prose, one can't help wondering about all the nice books written each year that confirm the politics of all right-thinking people. A particularly elegant one, which often appeared in comparison to *The Human Stain* because it similarly placed academic political correctness in a broader social context, was J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace.* It is everything *The Human Stain* is not: tidy, smooth, pared down to its essentials, and politically, for lack of a better word, agreeable. It begins with a white literature professor in South Africa, David Lurie, losing his job for sleeping with a student. Unlike Roth's Silk, Lurie is guilty and even vaguely ashamed of himself—the word "rape" flits across his mind. Disgraced, he moves to the country to live with his daughter, Lucy. Shortly after his arrival, the house is attacked by three black men who beat Lurie, steal his car, and rape Lucy. The rest of the book deals with the aftermath: Lucy has been impregnated by the rapists and decides to keep the baby—as a form of symbolic expiation, it appears, for the sins of apartheid. Lurie, meanwhile, grows less skeptical of country life and ways. *Disgrace* is very skillfully done, better than this outline indicates, but in ambition and execution it is a small book. It is suffused, as if in deference to the rape at its center, with a sense of humility, with the conspicuous attempt, through a spare, chastened language, to wash itself clean. For Coetzee, language itself is suspect: it has become "tired... eaten from the inside as if by termites." The book does not exactly propose a political program, but it suggests that we ought to make ourselves small and unobtrusive in the times to come; that in response to the impending historical catastrophe, the writer, instead of booming forth, should shrink; that, though the barbarians are here, we are they, and so on, we ought to continue, for the moment, to wait.

THE CONTRAST with Roth's political outlook could not be clearer; if Coetzee chooses a sort of negative, downsized liberalism, Roth explodes into a vengeful, bustling pessimism—"the decline of the West," rants the misanthropic Sabbath, "spread from the colleges to the police departments." But more important, to me, are their comparative visions of human possibility. Roth's men are capable not only of courageous, society-defying acts, but also outrageous and irretrievable moral crimes. Toward the end of *The Human Stain,* Zuckerman describes Coleman's wayward, obnoxious son Mark, bewailing his father at the funeral:

> Mark Silk apparently had imagined that he was going to have his father around to hate forever.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> To hate and hate and hate and hate, and then perhaps, in his own good time, after the scenes of accusation had reached their crescendo and he had flogged Coleman to within an inch of his life with his knot of filial grievance, to forgive. He thought Coleman was going to stay here till the whole play could be performed, as though he and Coleman had been set down not in life but on the southern hillside of the Athenian acropolis, in an outdoor theater sacred to Dionysus.

This is Roth at his absolute best: unstintingly clear, bordering close onto and crossing when necessary into cruelty. At the same time, it is a vision of life that is stunning above all in its generosity, for though Zuckerman has no patience for the son's self-dramatization, he recognizes immediately the impulse to read life as the enormous pitched battle that it is.

A LONG TIME ago, in a magazine that is now, politically, far, far away, Irving Howe pronounced a prosecutorial summation so devastating that all subsequent salvoes against Roth have been mere footnotes. Questioning, like a concerned potential father-in-law, not so much Roth's talents as the seriousness of his intentions, Howe remarked in the novelist's work "an impulse to submit the rich substance of human experience, sentiment, value, and aspiration. . . to a radically reductive leveling or simplification." A man learned in all the intricacies of the law, Howe was invoking an obscure but essential critical prerogative, the right to judge specific works according to the entirety of the author's "creative vision"—which in this case, he believed, was "deeply marred by vulgarity." Howe had praised Roth highly, though not without reservations, upon the publication of *Goodbye, Columbus*; he was joined by Alfred Kazin, who began his own review with the sly phrase, "Several weeks ago, I was awakened, while reading the *New Yorker,* by Philip Roth's 'Defender of the Faith.'" Howe was now summarily withdrawing those endorsements: the "solemn ecstasies" with which the critics had met *Portnoy's Complaint* were comically misplaced, he concluded, because Roth was a writer who had "denied himself, programmatically, a vision of major possibilities."

"A vision of major possibilities"—it is a ringing, damning phrase, and in a certain sense Roth remains indefensible: the "reductive leveling" of what Howe would have considered our highest aspirations (justice, for one) proceeds apace. But Roth's patent unconcern for politics is profoundly compensated for by his reconnaissance into the nether regions. "I understood right off," a disappointed Zuckerman reports of his meeting with Swede Levov in *American Pastoral,* "that I wasn't going to get anywhere near the substratum." And again, two pages later: "I kept waiting for him to lay bare something more than this pointed unobjectionableness, but all that rose to the surface was more surface." So Zuckerman spends the rest of the book doing excavation work.

And it is Zuckerman, finally, who is the most outsized character of all in these books. As he is old, and everything has already happened, nearly all the action is contained in the play of Zuckerman's imaginative sympathy, filling in an entire canvas from some bare husks of detail, trying to discern an explanation for everything that went so horribly wrong. *I Married a Communist* is the weakest of the three books because Murray Ringold relates what he already knows—there is no massive finding-out mission for Zuckerman to execute, and therefore no action. *The Human Stain,* on the other hand, burns with Zuckerman's due diligence, and toward the end of the book, aglow with the incredible hermeneutic task of the previous three hundred pages, his powers are so great, his understanding so well earned, that he sees, immediately, deep into the hearts of others, and we believe him: "I had the definite impression, in just our few moments together," he writes of Silk's daughter upon seeing her at the former dean's funeral, "that the link, now broken, between Lisa and her father would not be gone from her mind for a single day throughout the remainder of her life. . . .The consequences of having loved him so fully as a beloved girl-child, and of having been estranged from him at the time of his death, would never let this woman be."

Roth has always written from within. The poet Robert Kelly has recalled walking by his St. Mark's Place apartment in the late fifties

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and seeing the still unknown writer pounding at his typewriter at all hours of the day. The image of an incessantly typing Roth is apt, not so much because his books seem insufficiently "literary," but because they represent an idea of perpetual output. In the past forty years, he has published nineteen novels; for people of a certain generation, he has shaped their coming into consciousness. Throughout that time he has always hung a precarious balance between historical commentary (it's the "Age of Utter Abandon," he declared in *The Professor of Desire*; seventeen years later, it was the "Age of Total Schlock") and the historical symptomhood of channeling, without commentary, the zeitgeist. Even now, secluded in the Connecticut woods the way his Zuckerman is secluded in the Berkshires, he knows that all pretense to standing outside the fierce partisanship of events is ultimately futile. "I did no more than find a friend," Zuckerman remarks in *The Human Stain,* "and all the world's malice came rushing in."

So if a trial for Philip Roth is out of the question, perhaps what he once called the "Yiddish theater" of literary criticism could provide some preliminary expiation. For what Roth is offering, in place of politics, is a vision of the major moral possibilities of day-to-day life, a vision that his every sentence enumerates until it bursts, and that has no equals in contemporary fiction. In another context, Howe once wrote about "the quest for moral style," and I believe this has been Roth's quest as a novelist. Not a moralistic style but a style that pays homage in all its visions and revisions—and, in its italics and contortions, to the inadequacy even of those—to the awful consequences inherent in human action. "Yes, yes, yes," cries Sabbath, "he felt uncontrollable tenderness for his own shit-filled life. And a laughable hunger for more. More defeat! More disappointment! More deceit! More loneliness! More arthritis!" Yes—Roth's objectivity has always been charged, as Lionel Trilling said of Flaubert, with irritability, but one would be hard pressed to find in the grim history of the American jeremiad a voice more brilliantly affirming of human possibility. Neither Napoleon on horseback nor Prince Andrei at Austerlitz, it is nonetheless life, in America, writ large. ●

KEITH GESSEN is a contributing editor at *www.feedmag.com*.

NEVER NEEDED MORE THAN IT IS **TODAY.**
—NOAM CHOMSKY

In These Times is a rare beacon of truth-telling amid that swamp of political propaganda known as the media. It delivers the hard news one might expect from a free press. It explains the subtext for the continuing scandal of our decayed democracy. Read it—you will be regularly shocked by what the other journals leave out.
—WILLIAM GREIDER

THE MOST CREATIVE AND CHALLENGING NEWSMAGAZINE ON THE AMERICAN LEFT
—CORNEL WEST

Become an In These Times subscriber today!
Right now a **1-year, 24-issue** subscription is only $19.95
That's $17 off the regular subscription price!

For the past 23 years, **In These Times** has been the premier newsmagazine on the left, covering foreign policy, the environment and labor. We've won numerous awards from Project Censored, including first place in 1997 and 1998 for the most under-reported stories of the year. Start your subscription today and find out what you've been missing.

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT www.inthesetimes.com
call **1 (800) 827-0270** Mention code ADIS to get this great deal!
or write to In These Times, P.O. Box 1912, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-9885

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Good-bye to You

Alex Halberstadt

LET IT BLURT:
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF LESTER BANGS,
AMERICA'S GREATEST ROCK CRITIC
by Jim DeRogatis
Broadway Books (a division of Random House), 2000 332 pp $15.95

"IF LOVE IS truly going out of fashion forever, which I do not believe, then along with our nurtured indifference to each other will be an even more contemptuous indifference to each other's objects of reverence," wrote Lester Bangs in 1977, eulogizing Elvis Presley in the *Village Voice*. "We will continue to fragment in this manner, because solipsism holds all the cards at present; it is a king whose domain engulfs even Elvis's. But I can guarantee you one thing: we will never agree on anything as we agreed on Elvis. So I won't bother saying good-bye to his corpse; I will say good-bye to you." In retrospect, these words can be read as an apt farewell to Bangs himself, who died in 1982, and to the kind of demanding and fearless criticism exemplified by his work, which seemed to vanish from the pages of music magazines shortly thereafter.

Despite his moving epitaph to Presley, Bangs had little interest in the vernacular. Instead, in the frequently brilliant essays and reviews that appeared in *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, the *Village Voice*, and other publications, he championed music that offered an ecstatic, violent release from the constraints of AM radio and the conventions of polite society. He first glimpsed it in the avant-garde jazz of John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy, and later embraced the chaotic proto-punk sounds of the Stooges, the Godz, Patti Smith, and Lou Reed. Bangs wrote about his heroes in a style laced with irreverence, sarcasm, self-referential posturing, and often hilarious invective. It was an approach he shared with fellow rock critics Nick Tosches and Richard Meltzer, a corollary to the New Journalism of Norman Mailer and Tom Wolfe as well as the 1950s fiction of William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac, authors whom Bangs idolized as a teenager.

In his highly enjoyable biography, Jim DeRogatis traces the development of Bangs's famously contrarian persona back to the tract-house suburb of El Cajon, California, where Bangs began his life in 1948 and was raised as a Jehovah's Witness. To his mother's dismay, the adolescent Lester developed an interest in jazz, the Beats, and the narcotic properties of nutmeg, and soon a rant about the hypocrisy of religion delivered at a church meeting resulted in his lifelong ban from the Witnesses' Kingdom Hall. In high school, Lester's attempts to fit in were equally unconventional—in speech class he proudly recited Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" in its entirety, and when a teacher assigned him a ten-page paper for each of the five days of gym class he had missed, Lester responded with a fifty-page story entitled "Hector the Homosexual Monkey," for which he was promptly suspended.

In 1969, while employed at Streicher's Shoe Store in the Mission Valley Shopping Center, Bangs stumbled across his vocation when he answered a *Rolling Stone* ad soliciting "record reviews, movie reviews, and book reviews from interested writers." Soon Greil Marcus, the *Rolling Stone* record-reviews editor, was receiving as many as a dozen reviews per week from the shoe salesman from El Cajon. Although Bangs's editors quickly took notice of their star reviewer's creativity and brutally honest perspective, his gleeful pans infuriated the record companies that advertised in the fledgling San Francisco magazine, and his articles became increasingly unwelcome at *Rolling Stone*. It wasn't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

until he started contributing to *Creem* that Bangs found the most sympathetic forum for his writing, and in 1971 he moved to Detroit to write and edit for the tabloid that published his most freewheeling and original work.

Bangs was endlessly amused by the irony of attempting to discover meaning in a market-driven music he once referred to as "basically a bunch of garbage," and loved to puncture show-business megalomania and pretense. He once wrote that singer Mitch Ryder's real name was "Bill Bradshinkel," and in another piece vowed to personally disembowel James Taylor. Bangs told a friend that because of his upbringing as a Jehovah's Witness he was always trying to make converts, and in his most impassioned declarations of devotion, like his painfully earnest thirty-six-page manifesto about the Clash, he presented popular music as a series of moral choices. But then, only in Lester's moral universe could four musicians in a van hold the key to a Utopian future.

Despite his gifts, Bangs could be lazy, gratuitously belligerent, and unfair. His screeds against those he viewed as pretenders or vulgarians could be as vicious as they were hilarious, and his obsessions with his heroes often led to hyperbole. At *Creem*, Bangs devoted tens of thousands of words to his love-hate relationship with Lou Reed, and was only partially ironic when he declared Reed's *Metal Machine Music*—an hour of shrieking feedback that, according to Reed, contained audio frequencies lethal to the human ear—the "greatest album ever made." He also ambivalently but effectively cultivated a persona of a rock 'n' roll wild man, a feat that drew groupies and sycophants into Bangs's circle, but that belied, and nearly subsumed, his stature as a great American critic.

Unfortunately, *Let It Blurt* is often content to celebrate the mythological Lester. Unlike the best biographies, it fails to connect the life with the art, and as a result it sometimes reads like a litany of all-night binges, insults, and food fights, fueled by whisky, amphetamines, and Romilar cough syrup. The aftermath—shattered relationships, squandered opportunities, evictions—is often described in a series of numbing clichés about the price of excess. More problematic is the book's tendency to blithely memorialize Bangs's life as if the nature of his achievement was a foregone conclusion. Today, the sole surviving Bangs artifact is *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, a slim and desperately incomplete posthumous volume compiled by Greil Marcus, and one might have hoped that DeRogatis would have adopted a more lapidary approach toward Bangs's writing. Strangely, DeRogatis, a pop music critic at the Chicago *Sun Times* who owes much of his own pugnacious style to Bangs, has surprisingly little to say about his mentor's work. And his comparisons of Bangs to Hunter S. Thompson and Charles Bukowski perpetuate a stereotype that is both tiresome and misleading.

The danger of celebrating Bangs's self-invention as a Rabelaisian figure is that it often conceals the qualities that make his story worth telling in the first place. Like his legion of imitators, one is tempted to embrace his candor and outrageousness while neglecting his encyclopedic knowledge of music history, his voraciousness and generosity, and a sense of humor that could win over even his detractors, who, by the end of his career, were admittedly many. Bangs strove for the "free-flowing, imagistic quality" of fiction, and his best sentences mutate, digress, and reconfigure themselves with an associative dexterity worthy of Henry Miller. Most important, Bangs knew that the vestments and posturing of rock were as essential as the music and lyrics, and in decidedly lowbrow cadences demanded that rock, on its own terms, meet the criteria of art. It was this activist yet remarkably fluent approach to popular music that made Bangs its first great critic, placing him in the company of Randall Jarrell and Pauline Kael rather than the lifestyle icons he is compared to in *Let It Blurt*. As evidence, one only has to read his essay on Van Morrison's "Astral Weeks," an ambitious piece of literary criticism that transposes Morrison's lyrics with those of Federico García Lorca. It stands as one of the most nuanced, romantic, and utterly original essays written about rock 'n' roll, and reading it is perhaps the best shortcut to understanding both Bangs and the expressive possibilities of the genre.

One of DeRogatis's stated goals, and probably his finest achievement in *Let It Blurt*, is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

charting a history of rock criticism. Like the sections about Bangs, that history is short on analysis and rich in salacious detail, but nonetheless provides a fascinating look at the personalities whose work laid the foundation for most subsequent attempts to write cogently about popular music. Those looking for a "Rock-Crit Babylon" will not be disappointed: here is *Village Voice* writer and editor Robert Christgau editing Bangs in the nude and flinging his dinner at former girlfriend Ellen Willis, who authored a rock column for the *New Yorker*; Greil Marcus puffing on a professorial pipe at Altamont; and Bangs's romantic misadventures with several female colleagues. The action takes place against the backdrop of a bygone era of high promotion, when record companies flew writers to lavishly catered events in hopes of securing a sympathetic review.

ALL OF THIS would be of purely anecdotal value, except that the span covered in *Let It Blurt*—roughly the decade between 1968 and 1978—marked a period of unprecedented creative freedom in rock criticism The generational shift and the accompanying temporary suspension of censorship affected print and broadcast media, the record industry, and even Hollywood, where filmmakers such as Monte Hellman, Bob Rafelson, and Martin Scorsese made films that were as frank, iconoclastic, and strange as Bangs's writing. For music journalists, a group of small magazines and tabloids devoted to rock 'n' roll—*Crawdaddy*, *Rolling Stone*, *Fusion*—as well as a changing of the guard at the more traditional outlets ushered in the newfound freedom, which turned out to be exceedingly short-lived. The fusillades written by Bangs and his compatriots would not have found a place in print a decade earlier; a decade later, they became nearly as unpublishable.

By the early eighties, Bangs regularly contributed to the *Village Voice*, but for the first time was having difficulty finding a suitable home for his writing. A climate of editorial conservatism set in as music publications began to re-align themselves more closely with record company interests, and a with increasing frequency, Bangs often found himself rewriting articles and having them rejected by editors. Of his countless book proposals, only two throwaway fan biographies of Rod Stewart and the band Blondie became a reality, and Bangs resorted to writing for musicians' magazines such as *Guitar Player* and *Gig*. Not surprisingly, Bangs's favorite topic during his last years was the desultory state of the record industry. "The music business was always cynical," Bangs wrote in 1981, "but the cynicism of the music business as it stands today is awesome, surreal."

Those words could have been written today with even more veracity, and one wonders what heights of indignation Bangs might have scaled at a time when the vast majority of MTV and radio programming is paid for with record company dollars, corporate homunculi such as Britney Spears and 'N Sync rule the charts, and once adventurous magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* have become as synonymous with the trade as *Billboard* and *Cashbox*. Bangs frequently complained that "professionalism" was becoming rampant among young writers, and in today's transaction-oriented "thumbs-up" climate, it is doubtful that the author of "James Taylor Marked for Death" would have found a sympathetic editor.

For better or worse, we will never know. As years of drug use and neglect added up, Bangs found himself waking up on sidewalks. Friends would put food in his pockets so he would remember to eat when he got home. When Bangs's friend Nancy Stillman walked into his Sixth Avenue apartment on the evening of April 30, 1982, she found him slumped on the couch, dead of an accidental overdose of the prescription painkiller Darvon. A record was spinning on the turntable, the stylus caught in the leadout groove. Besides his friends and fans, Bangs left behind several million words of notes, reviews, essays, and proposals. Despite its imperfections, *Let It Blurt* is a welcome addition to the Bangs canon and makes one impatient for more of Bangs's writing to see the light of day. ●

ALEX HALBERSTADT contributes to *Salon.com* and the *New York Times*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You Were Imperfect Like Us

John Palattella

LATER AUDEN
by Edward Mendelson
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999 570 pp $30

DURING THE 1930s, W. H. Auden populated his poems and plays with heroes struggling to put their shoulders to the wheel of History, and his admirers anointed him a hero in return. Of Auden's first two books, *Poems* and *Paid on Both Sides*, Randall Jarrell wrote, "when old men, dying in their beds, mumble something unintelligible to the nurse, it is some of those lines that they will be repeating." When Auden left England for Valencia in January 1937 to aid the republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, the London papers covered his departure in the news pages, not the gossip columns. Then there's E.M. Forster, who confessed that because Auden wrote the line "We must love one another or die" in "September 1, 1939," "he can command me to follow him."

The Auden who emerges from Edward Mendelson's *Later Auden* is no less commanding than the committed poet lauded during the thirties, but he's of an entirely different cast of mind. Mendelson's Auden is a poet who came to distrust the poem from which Forster plucked his moral talisman. He's a poet who was deeply uncomfortable about using poetry to advocate a partisan cause; who tapped fully into his creative powers only when he stopped using a didactic tone to disguise the arguments he had with himself about social contradictions and personal problems; and whose understanding of responsibility became morally acute when he cast aside communist notions of Utopia for Christian notions of imperfection and original sin.

Critics have not been kind to Auden for turning away from politics in his verse. In "Outside the Whale," the British historian E. P. Thompson claimed that Auden's post-1930s writing signaled "an abdication of intellectual responsibility in the face of all social experience." Auden had failed Thompson because the poet no longer believed that art is a weapon or nothing at all. Reading *Later Auden*, however, it's hard not to conclude that Auden was right to give up politics to explore arguments with himself. Auden got involved in politics for the wrong reasons, and he was honest enough to admit it. An observation he made in 1939 about some fellow travelers applied to him as well: "There are many people, and they number some artists among them, who today seek in politics an escape from the unhappiness of their private lives, as once people sought refuge in the monastery and convent." Auden left politics to immerse himself in social experience, not retreat from it; to accept intellectual responsibility, not abdicate it. Forster and Thompson expected Auden to cut a monumental figure, perhaps like "The leader looking over / Into the happy valley" in Auden's early poem "From scars where kestrels hover." Auden became something different: a poet who sang of human unsuccess in a rapture of distress.

IN *LATER AUDEN*, Mendelson looks at the poetry Auden wrote shortly after his arrival in New York City in January 1939 until his death in Austria in 1973. He claims that Auden's work exhibits a recurring pattern. "The poems in each stage of his career criticized those of the preceding stage," Mendelson explains, "not so much for being wrong as for letting a parable harden into a myth. Verse techniques, historical interpretations, psychological insights, and ethical imperatives he had labored to devise in response to earlier personal and public crises had gradually settled, he thought, into mere habits and conventions. He generally be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gan each new stage with a vehement renunciation of past errors, overstating his objections in order to rouse himself to find something new."

Mendelson first described this pattern in *Early Auden*, published in 1981, most notably in his discussion of several poems Auden wrote about events surrounding the Spanish Civil War. Auden went to Spain in January 1937, intending to drive an ambulance, but officials in Barcelona asked him to broadcast radio propaganda. He quit after a very short time and wandered toward the front in Aragon, intending to stay a month; he returned to England after several days. As Auden revealed to an interviewer in the 1960s, he was, like many other volunteers on the left, deeply disillusioned by what he witnessed in Spain. He realized the war was a battle between the agents of Hitler and those of Stalin; yet he also knew, as he told the interviewer, that any disillusionment he felt about the Republican cause "could only be an advantage to Franco. And however I felt, I certainly didn't want Franco to win. It is always a moral problem when to speak."

Yet communicate he did, most famously in "Spain 1937," which he wrote in March a few weeks after returning to England. Auden, of course, grew so embarrassed by "Spain 1937" that he revised it for publication in *Another Time* in 1939 and banished it from the volumes of collected poems he published after the 1950s. It's a truism among some Auden enthusiasts that Auden believed every word of "Spain 1937," and they often chastise him for judging it against the standards of his later work. Mendelson, however, by drawing out the contradictions within "Spain 1937" as well as among the other poems and essays Auden wrote at the time, shows that the younger Auden was just as divided over "Spain 1937" as his older self was.

Mendelson argues persuasively that the poem rides on two contradictory notions of history: choices made by individuals ("'What's your proposal? To build the just city? I will'"), and actions overseen by some ineradicable progressive force ("Our moments of tenderness blossom / As the ambulance and the sandbag; / Our hours of friendship into a people's army"). On the one hand, Mendelson writes, the poem asserts that "all human actions are chosen by the will," but on the other hand it also "maintains that some special actions in the political realm, actions directed at certain social goals, are the product not of will but of something very much like unconscious instinctive nature." Yet that purposive force, which Auden dubs "History" in the poem's famous closing lines, "cannot help or pardon." "Spain 1937," in Mendelson's words, "is the record of a disillusionment half accepted, half denied." What's more, he explains that in July 1937 Auden wrote a prose statement supporting the Valencia government for inclusion in the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War*. Coming on the heels of "Spain 1937," Auden's statement is astonishing because nowhere in his remarks does he say anything about the Valencia government's merits. The pamphlet statement is a record of disillusionment embraced.

BEFORE LONG, Auden concluded that politics was a dirty game best left to scoundrels. "The enemy was and still is the politician, i.e., the person who wants to organise the lives of others and make them toe the line," he wrote in the summer of 1939 in *The Prolific and the Devourer*, a collection of aphorisms unpublished during his lifetime. Auden knew of what he spoke. In New York City in March 1939 he had appeared before the Foreign Correspondents' Dinner Forum, a group devoted to aiding Spanish refugees. Republican Madrid was on the brink of surrender, and Auden gave a rousing speech defending democracy. The audience cheered loudly. But as he explained to his English confidante, A.E. Dodds, in July 1939, the experience appalled him. "I suddenly found I could really do it, that I could make a fighting demagogic speech and have the audience roaring. And, my dear, it is so exciting but so absolutely degrading; I felt just covered with dirt afterwards."

When Mendelson picks up this story in *Later Auden*, Auden is writing poems that follow the moral example of Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus*, one of the Old Masters to whom Auden apprenticed himself in "Musée des Beaux Arts" in 1938.

> About suffering they were never wrong,
> The Old Masters: how well they understood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking duly along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

"Defeat and suffering no longer seemed to occur in the grand decisive struggles of 'Spain,' but happened almost without being noticed, while someone else was eating or opening the window," Mendelson observes. "The expensive delicate ship in 'Musée des Beaux Arts' had *somewhere to get to*—as history did in 'Spain'—but the defeated victim it left behind, a boy falling out of the sky, was a unique and vulnerable person, neither a class nor an army." Like the ploughman, Auden was turning from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

Auden's first major attempt to burrow into ordinary lives was "The Sea and the Mirror," a series of monologues for fictional characters borrowed from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the subject of one of the strongest chapters of *Later Auden*. The poem is a rhetorical tour de force. Auden's concern is each character's conflicted thoughts about love, morality, and art, which he casts into an astonishing range of forms, such as a villanelle, a sestina, and Dantesque triplets. The poem's pinnacle is Caliban's monologue, a thirty-page torrent of prose rife with classical eloquence and rude slang and rendered in a version of the late style of Henry James. The poem "repeatedly invites its reader to assent to one character's plausible argument, then brings in another character who explodes it," Mendelson argues. It "is designed to educate and disenchant through a progressive series of disillusionments." As in *The Age of Anxiety*, a dialogue between three men and a woman who meet in a New York bar in wartime that Auden published in 1948, "The Sea and the Mirror" recognizes that such ordinary disappointments and dilemmas are not the husk of knowledge but its very seed.

No one is better acquainted with Auden's papers than Mendelson, who was a graduate student at Yale when he first met Auden in 1970. (Auden appointed him executor in 1972 after Mendelson used his cache of copies of Auden's work to help the poet assemble a collection of prose, *Forewords and Afterwords*.) So it's no surprise that in *Later Auden* Mendelson meticulously weaves together a vast array of materials—collected and uncollected poems, draft manuscripts of poems, collected and uncollected prose, and correspondence—to evoke Auden's climate of opinion. And though *Later Auden* is primarily a critical work, Mendelson often draws an apt detail from Auden's life to embellish his analysis of the poet's methods and ideas. Mendelson mentions that when Auden was drafting "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," he wrote to his publishers to learn the exact time of Yeats's death. They didn't know, and Auden asked elsewhere until he had the facts straight (late afternoon). In the early 1940s, while under the sway of the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, Auden urged Peter Drucker's *The Future of Industrial Man* on his friends as an example, in Mendelson's words, "of Christian thought applied to the practicalities of management."

In *Early Auden* and *Later Auden*, Mendelson argues that although Auden mastered a few key lessons of literary modernism—its formal inventions, its ability to be both comic and grotesque, its embrace of contradiction—he was hardly its disciple. Auden lashed out at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eliot's anti-Semitism and shuddered at Yeats's enthusiasm for fairies and unchanging historical cycles. Nor did he endorse his elders' attempts to restore to its full powers an earlier, nobler poetic language warped by some cultural cataclysm—the dissociation of sensibility in England or the devolution of the Protestant aristocracy in Ireland. And unlike Eliot and Yeats, both of whom had fascist or authoritarian sympathies, Auden "woke to the recognition that an ideal order imposed on a recalcitrant citizenry, which included themselves, would be an arid despotism," Mendelson writes in *Later Auden*.

Mendelson's Auden has a more liberal or skeptical bent. One of Mendelson's characteristic turns, particularly in the second volume, is to explain how Auden spent months or years "unlearning mistaken presuppositions, experimenting unsuccessfully with new ones, and cleaning others off his workbench, not because they were wrong, but because they had outlasted their usefulness." Another is to spell out how Auden often conducted arguments in his prose that either contradicted or were less extreme than the arguments made in his verse. Mendelson also notes regularly that when "Auden wrote a long poem he recognized as grand, emphatic, and false, he immediately followed it with one that was quiet, tentative, and truthful." In Mendelson's telling, Auden's career becomes something like a modernist long poem, a continuously evolving work that dutifully catalogs its failures, teems with styles and points of view always veering toward their antitheses, and coheres occasionally around a gorgeous makeshift work of consolation—"Lay your sleeping head, my love," "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," "Musée des Beaux Arts," "In Praise of Limestone."

Even as Mendelson accounts for Auden's accomplishments, he never spares criticism of Auden's errors of judgment. Of several religious poems Auden wrote in the early 1940s, Mendelson claims that "the contemplative saints briefly but disastrously took over much of his work, and they ruined every poem they touched." But Mendelson doesn't dwell on such mistakes, treating them instead as mere blemishes to the heroic face he puts on Auden's meditations. Yet when that face is seen in a less forgiving light, one glimpses there the terrified look of a poet hostage to indecision and interminable self-analysis. After all, if Auden was always unlearning mistaken presuppositions, one can't help but wonder if all of Auden's presuppositions were mistakes. Did not any retain their usefulness? What Mendelson characterizes as Auden's eloquent self-scrutiny others might consider an elegant diffidence.

Still, reading *Later Auden* one cannot escape the fact that Auden made an art out of mistrusting himself. "Lay your sleeping head, my love" is typical: an acknowledgment of fallibility ("Human on my faithless arm") follows hard on the opening moment of seductive charm. Despair and regret were seductive to Auden as well as being his language of seduction. The poety he wrought from that language was not ideological and decisive; it was unorthodox and beautiful *and* enigmatic, much like the inadequate but indispensable landscape he traversed in "In Praise of Limestone":

> It has a worldly duty which in spite of itself
> It does not neglect, but calls into question
> All the Great Powers assume; it disturbs our rights. ●

JOHN PALATTELLA's essays and reviews have appeared in *Dissent*, *Lingua Franca*, and other publications. He lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Recycle *Dissent*

The following issues of *Dissent* are out of print:

1959: Fall	**1988: Winter**
1965: Spring	**1990: Spring**
1966: May-June	**1992: Winter**
1972: Winter	**1994: Winter, Summer**
1974: Winter	**1995: Summer**
1977: Winter	**1996: Winter**
1984: Fall	**1997: Summer**
1985: Spring	**1998: Winter, Summer**
1987: Fall	**1999: Spring**

If you were feeling guilty about getting rid of any of these, you don't have to. Just mail them to us at 310 Riverside Drive, Suite 1201, New York, NY 10025, and, capitalism being what it is, accept both our thanks and a tax deduction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Globalization and the Environment

Editors:

The exchange between Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens ("Is Globalization Americanization?" Summer 2000) was disappointing in its treatment of environmental concerns. Giddens's optimism that the dirty phases of industrial development can somehow be leapfrogged through the use of clean technologies misses the central point—that the global South has almost no influence on the trajectory of technological development in the world economy. If these activities were based on advanced, clean, efficient, and user-friendly technologies, they wouldn't be outsourced in the first place. Why is waste, far from being "redundant," still enormously profitable? Why are the positive technological changes Giddens anticipates always just over the horizon?

The answers have little to do with technology. Giddens recognizes that, economically speaking, state power isn't what it once was. Odd, then, that he falls back on an archaic, country-centered view of North and South in which "poorer countries" are uninterested in sacrificing economic growth for the sake of environmental protection. This view ignores the trans-state character of economic power in the world economy. In struggles against large dams, persistent organic pollutants, or geneticaly engineered foods, the lines of conflict have little to do with interstate North-South diplomacy. Instead, they pit corporate interests, more often than not supported by state power, against increasingly globalized coalitions of social movements and citizens' groups.

Giddens's faith in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and "globalization from below" needs a more critical edge. We must distinguish between movement-based coalitions that press powerful institutions for real change and a well-institutionalized NGO sector that too often reproduces the same problems of incrementalism, antidemocratic practice, and North-South paternalism that plague governments, corporations, and intergovernmental organizations.

Hutton is right to call attention to power and to ask whose agenda is being furthered. But this makes it all the more strange to see him dismiss environmentalism as unprofitable—as though the profitability of such activities were determined by an invisible hand working its market magic. It's not that capitalism has avoided pollution control and use of efficient materials because they are inherently unprofitable. Quite the opposite: pollution and waste have been made profitable by laws, technologies, and institutions that make it easy to off-load the enormous social costs onto people and communities residing downstream, downwind, or across the border.

We need to ask what makes things profitable. In the environmental realm, the answer is more often than not corporate power, state facilitation, and the failure to force polluters to internalize the cost of harm.

KEN CONCA
College Park, Md.

Rootless Consumers

Editors:

I found Steven Pressman's essay on e-commerce very provoking ("E-Commerce, The Sales Tax, and Equity," Summer 2000). He's right to say that sales taxes are regressive, and that they should be repealed and replaced with a more equitable system. But how long does he think that would take (he never even speculates)? In the meantime, where is the equity in letting oligopolistic, Wall Street-driven corporations like Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble off the hook, especially when sales tax accounts for much of the difference between their prices and the ones charged by the dwindling number of independent booksellers and other merchants who have to compete with them? The most telling aspect of Pressman's piece is his image of himself—the rootless consumer-intellectual—now in Florida, now in South Dakota, now in London or Paris—sitting alone with his computer and incessantly clicking his mouse in search of another bargain. Does this guy actually live anywhere? "The real issue," he writes, "is whether we can and should have sales taxes in a global economy." Really? I would have thought that the real issue would be democratizing the economy and promoting community-based enterprise and culture. Or is all that passé for acquisitive, globalized lefties?

ZELDA BRONSTEIN
Berkeley, Calif.

Steven Pressman Replies:

I am not optimistic that states will eliminate their sales taxes any time soon. My article pointed out a number of good reasons to oppose the sales tax, especially in a global economy. My hope was to get people thinking along these lines—a necessary requirement if we are to adopt more progressive forms of taxation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A couple of years ago I picked up my fifth-grade daughter from an after-school rehearsal for her East Harlem school's chorus. The mother of two other children was late, and I agreed to wait with them until she arrived. I was a little put out until she showed up an hour later, with an infant and another child in tow, and I learned that they had traveled almost an hour and a half from their home in Bedford-Stuyvesant. I didn't have to ask why they would endure such a grueling commute. The school is a good one. Founded by Deborah Meier in the early seventies, it is the prototype nationally for small, progressive public schools that aim to provide a well-rounded education and resist the hysteria around testing and tracking. We, too, chose to send our children out of our school district in order to be part of it.

I thought of that family's desire for a decent education when I read two separate reports in the *New York Times* that illustrate the abandonment of the ideal of accessible public education. They were tales from one city but two worlds.

A block away from me, in the middle-class neighborhood close to Columbia University, the university plans to build a twelve-story elementary school cum apartments for its faculty and staff. The area at 110th Street and Broadway is quite congested and none of the surrounding buildings rises twelve stories.

In a neighborhood that boasts three private elementary schools and at least two good public ones, why did Columbia need its own school? Well, it seems that you can't get good help these days, and many potential faculty are reluctant to come to New York because of "high housing prices and the negative perception of the New York City schools," as the *Times* put it. Why, public school advocates asked, hadn't Columbia gone into partnership with a struggling local public school or started its own charter school? The university refused to comment, but it was clear that it wanted control over hiring and firing, curriculum, and, perhaps most important, who could get in. It wants a showcase school.

With its resources, Columbia could have a significant impact on the public schools around it. The university claimed that it was not abandoning the public schools, but it obviously had put the needs of its own community above those of the surrounding one.

Meanwhile, across town, at 110th Street and Fifth Avenue, near my daughters' former elementary school, another story was unfolding. The Edison Corporation, the country's largest for-profit school management company, plans to move its corporate headquarters from midtown to East Harlem. It wants to build a big office building cum showcase school.

Edison, the Amazon.com of the for-profit educational world, has not yet made any money from its ventures to save failing public schools. And its track record is mixed. But its investors are convinced that millions can be made on the lives of poor children underserved by beleaguered public school systems. None of the elite private schools a few blocks south and light years away feared competition. For this article, the *Times* did not seem to have interviewed anyone connected with the network of alternative public schools in the area. Instead, the article noted the potential of four hundred jobs, presumably in the offices, and four hundred and eighty construction jobs.

Edison will undoubtedly pour a lot into this school to show what it can do. I thought of our elementary school, where one year the budget for supplies was so low that we had to send pencils from home, where the library was only open intermittently as parent volunteers were available.

Money would go to both new schools on 110th street. At one end, children would be encouraged to explore, to challenge, to think critically, to take their place among the elites. At the other end, children would be prepped to do well on standardized tests. At neither end would thought be given to the common good, to an ideal that brings races and classes together to forge an educational community. There will be some individual gains, perhaps some profits, certainly some prestige. But we will all be diminished as the tall towers rise.

Maxine Phillips

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Real-World Economics

New in paperback!

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM

Radical Perspectives on Economic Theory and Policy

Ron Baiman, Heather Boushey, and **Dawn Saunders,** Eds.

Some of the leading heterodox economists of our time dispute the notion that what's good for Wall Street is good for the world. Demonstrating a variety of alternative economic approaches, they challenge readers to develop critical perspectives on such timely topics as international financial crises, health care, social security, and welfare reform.

368 pages
0-7656-0529-5 Cloth $69.95 / 0530-9 Paper $29.95

New in paperback!

PENSIONS, POLITICS, AND THE ELDERLY

Historic Social Movements and Their Lessons for Our Aging Society

Daniel J. B. Mitchell

This historical exploration of U.S. pensioner movements from the 1920s through the 1950s offers valuable insights on how the forthcoming retirement of the "baby-boom" generation could proceed. The author draws on several noteworthy examples, including the Ham & Eggs movement and the Townsend Plan, to show how effectively a "politics of the elderly" can develop and function.

216 pages
0-7656-0518-X Cloth $64.95 / 0519-8 Paper $23.95

Subscribe today to these acclaimed and authoritative journals:

CHALLENGE

The Magazine of Economic Affairs
Editor: **Jeffrey Madrick**

"There is simply no other way to keep up with the real issues in the ongoing debate on economic policy than to read *Challenge*. Each new batch of articles provides a useful and important reality check on the way that policy debates are framed by the conventional press."
— William Wolman, Chief Economist, *Business Week* and "CNBC Television"

"I don't see how any thoughtful person interested in today's economic world can do without *Challenge*." — Robert Heilbroner, New School University

ISSN 0577-5132 6 issues per year
Vol. 44: Jan/Feb – Nov/Dec 2001
US Institutional Rate: $172.00
US Individual Rate: $47.00
Foreign Institutional Rate: $260.00
Foreign Individual Rate: $68.00

WORKING*USA*

The Journal of Labor and Society
Editor: **Immanuel Ness**

"Like no other journal! In article after article, *WorkingUSA* explores the promises and pitfalls of a revived labor movement. In other words, a journal about the most important development in American politics today."
— Francis Fox Piven, City University of New York Graduate Center

"I happily recommend it."
— John Kenneth Gailbraith, Harvard University

"... essential reading."
— Gerald Horne, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

ISSN 1089-7011 4 issues per year
Vol. 5: Summer 2001 – Spring 2002
US Institutional Rate: $106.00
US Individual Rate: $35.00
Foreign Institutional Rate: $162.00
Foreign Individual Rate: $53.00

M.E. Sharpe PUBLISHER
TO ORDER Call: 800-541-6563 or 914-273-1800 Fax: 914-273-2106
www.mesharpe.com

AD013C

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joanne Barkan
50 WAYS TO SAY YOU'RE FIRED

Liza Featherstone
FIGHTING PRIVATE PRISONS

Maxine Phillips
ACROSS 110TH STREET

POLITICS ABROAD

Shalom Lappin: Against Blairism
Frédéric Martel: Gay Unions in France
Kira Brunner: Resistance in Belgrade
Winifred Tate: Colombia, Drugs, and Us
Douglas W. Payne: Neoliberalism in Mexico

ARGUMENTS

Menachem Rosner disagrees with
Jo-Ann Mort and **Gary Brenner**
on the future of the kibbutz

MAGAZINES

Ashley Nelson: Power Shopping
Marshall Berman: Trees in Brooklyn

BOOKS

John Hoerr on Steelworkers in the Fifties
Alex Halberstadt on "America's Greatest Rock Critic"
Keith Gessen on Philip Roth
John Palattella on W.H. Auden

Dissent
310 Riverside Drive, Suite
New York, NY 10025

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED